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THE CORSICAN LOVERS

A STORY OF THE VENDETTA

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BY

CHARLES FELTON PIDGIN

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THE CORSICAN LOVERS.

CHAPTER I.

BROTHERLY LOVE.

"You have no right, Pascal, to command me to marry a man whom I do not love."

The speaker was a young girl not more than eighteen years of age. As she spoke, the flashing of her eyes and her clenched hands betokened the intensity of her feelings.

The person to whom the words were addressed was a man of about forty. He was smooth-shaven, and the black, shaggy eyebrows which met above the bridge of his nose, gave to his face a stern and almost forbidding expression. He did not reply to his sister's impassioned words for some time, but sat, apparently unconcerned, tapping lightly on the library table with the fingers of his right hand.

At last he spoke: "I do not command you, Vivienne; all I ask is that you will comply with your father's dying wish."

"How do you know that it was his dying wish? He was dead when found, stabbed to the heart, as you told me, by Manuel Della Coscia—that brave Corsican who ran away to escape the vengeance he so well deserved."

The man looked up approvingly. "My sister, that was spoken like a true Batistelli. If you loved your father, as your words seem to indicate, I do not see how you can disobey his slightest wish."

The girl turned upon him, that bright flash again in her eyes. "Why are you so anxious that I should marry? Why is it that you yourself do not marry?"

The man's answer came quickly: "I have sworn, and so has your brother Julien, that we will not marry until our father's death has been avenged."

The girl placed both her hands on the edge of the table, leaned forward, and looked into her brother's face, as she said: "And neither will I."

She spoke with suppressed intensity.

"You knew our father," she continued; "you loved him when he was alive and you can love him now. You have something tangible to remember; I can only love his memory. I was but a child a few days old when he fell beneath the knife of the assassin. I do love his memory, and I know if he were living he would not condemn me to a loveless marriage."

Again that inscrutable look came upon the man's face. He shrugged his shoulders and the dark line of eyebrows lifted perceptibly.

"I do not know what he would do; I only know what he did."

"And what did he do?" broke in Vivienne.

The man started. The question was asked with such vehemence that for an instant his marked self-possession was overcome.

"What did he do?" he repeated, thus gaining time for he wished to think of the most forcible way in which to present the matter to his sister. "I will tell you know that he talked the matter over with old Count Mont d'Oro. The Count is dead, or there would be a living witness to the compact. But a few days before our father's death, in fact the very day you were even while you were in your nurse's arms, he said to me, 'I am glad that it is a daughter. She shall be called Vivienne, and when she grows to womanhood shall be a countess, for I have talked the matter

with Count Mont d'Oro, and we have both agreed that the little Count Napier shall be the husband of my little Vivienne.' Three days later I looked upon his lifeless body. The words of the dead cannot be changed."

It was now the young girl's turn to think before speaking. The position that her brother had taken seemed, for the moment at least, unanswerable; but woman's wisdom, like her wit, is equal to any emergency.

"Brother Pascal," she began, and her voice was tremulous, "when I was bereft of a father's and a mother's love, you took their place. It is to you I have always looked for advice—both Julien and I, for you are so much older and wiser than we are. You have taken our father's place; his words have become your words, but you are living and can change your words and free me from this bondage, for I would rather die than become the wife of Count Napier, or any other man I cannot love."

Pascal Batistelli set his teeth tightly together, a dark look came into his face. "Am I to understand, then, that you absolutely refuse to marry Count Mont d'Oro?"

"Not only him, but any one else," answered the girl. "I am content as I am."

She turned away from the table, walked to the window, and looked out upon the grounds which stretched far and wide from the castle walls. The bright sunlight fell on tree and bush and on the brightly tinted flowers. All was beauty and peace without. How could nature be so happy, and she so miserable? Suddenly she turned and approached her brother, who had not changed his position.

"When did you wish this marriage to take place?" she asked, making a vain attempt to smile.

"On your eighteenth birthday," he said, calmly.

"Oh, I have some time, then, to wait," and she gave

from which Vivienne had looked at the estates. "How could a sensible man will?"

Pascal took a small silver key, turning to an old escritoire, opened it, and therefrom a paper. He then went to the table. "I should not have known myself, " what was in my father's will, the notary to break the seals and well to know what the future had in store for others. My father executed his will, I was made guardian of my brother Vivienne, until they became their wants as their father would. A strange coincidence, my brother was years older than my sister. In the year twenty-five and she eighteen, the will was opened and what I alone knew. I am a notary, for I have paid him his fee. Then he read the document carefully.

"If my daughter Vivienne marries, I'll give her the estate. If d'Oro's son Napier, on or before the day as he will be wealthy in his

be worth much, and the other half of my estate shall go to Julien, if living; if not, all shall go to Vivienne."

"A very unfair will," said Pascal, as he replaced the document in the *escritoire*. "If the dead could come back, such injustice would probably be remedied."

There was a tap at the door, which opened almost immediately and Adolphe, Pascal's valet, entered.

"The Count Mont d'Oro."

"Admit him," said Pascal, and a moment later the young Count advanced with outstretched hand, exclaiming even before their hands met:

"What news? What news? What does she say?"

"Oh, the impatience of you young lovers!" cried Pascal. "I think the leaven of love must have been left out of my composition. I have never yet met a woman who could put such fire into my blood as there seems to be in yours, my dear Count."

"No more about me. Let us speak of her. What does she say?"

"Do not be too impatient. Even if I could repeat her very words, I could not say them just as she did. I can but translate them into a cold, formal phrase. She will see you."

"I thought she would," cried the young Count, "and when I kneel and lay my love at her feet, she will accept me and make me the happiest of men."

"Be not too confident," said Pascal; "she is young and wilful. You know the Batistellis are a determined race. I did not try to plead your cause. I am not used to love-making, and I felt that I should injure your prospects if I spoke in your behalf. But I warn you that you must use your eloquence and not appear too confident at the first."

The Count laughed. It was not an honest, sincere laugh. A good judge of human nature would have detected in it a hollow sound—more of mockery than of true passion.

"One can see by looking at you, Pascal, that not an Adonis. You are not to blame if you lack the graces of Apollo. I have not descended from the ancient gods of Greece, but I have had an experience which even they might envy. I have run the gamut of Parisian society from the ante-chamber of royal palaces to the gutter, and in Paris there are beauties to be found in the gutter."

"I would not tell Vivienne that," suggested Pascal.

"Of course not," said the Count; "she is young and inexperienced and would not understand."

"She might not understand," said Pascal, "but on the other hand she might imagine more than truth and that would be fatal to your prospects, for you, Count, that she is a woman who will not let a man she does not love, and she will insist that he love her and her only."

Again the Count laughed. "Why, even the Republic cannot command so much as that. I must bury the past. She is worth it. By the way, my dear Pascal, I think you told me that in a week she marries me before her eighteenth birthday, that she will go with her."

"My father made a most foolish will," said the Count guardedly.

"That is what troubles me," said the Count. "I feel like a robber; as though I had placed a pistol to your head and said, 'Pascal Batistelli, give me your sister and your estates or you are a dead man.'"

he added, after a moment's thought: "I do not know that I can do it, after all. I think I shall go to Paris."

"Then you do not love my sister?" queried the Count. He did not think the Count meant what he said, but he suited his purpose to take the remark seriously.

"When I am with her, yes," said the Count.

BROTHERLY LOVE.

7

your sister Vivienne is the divine She; but, as I told you, there are beautiful women in Paris."

Pascal felt the ground slipping from under his feet. "When you are married, Count, you can go to Paris; you are not obliged to live here in this dull place."

"Oh, yes, but they will know that I am married." Then, with a conceit which did not seem particularly offensive on account of the manner in which it was spoken, he added: "And, you know, I am quite a catch myself."

"Certainly," said Pascal, "and when the estates of Mont d'Oro and Batistelli are united, I have no doubt that many a fair eye in Paris will be wet with tears."

"Well spoken, my dear Pascal," cried the Count, as he threw his arm about the neck of his prospective brother-in-law.

Pascal did not appreciate the caress, but the urgency of the situation prevented his refusing it. "But you will see her?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" cried the Count. "My father wished this marriage to take place; my mother does not think that I am good enough for your sister. That is one reason why I am determined to marry her. To-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow," said Pascal; "any hour in the morning. We breakfast at eight; no earlier than that, of course."

"Don't worry," said the Count, "I do not rise until nine. By half-past ten she may expect her ardent suitor." He flourished his hat through the air, bowed low to Pascal before placing it on his head, and a moment later was gone.

Pascal walked to the window and looked again upon the far-reaching acres of the Batistelli estate. "She must marry him; then I shall have half. That precious brother of mine will be killed in some drunken brawl or die a sot, then all will be mine."

THE Countess Mont d'Oro and
inner together. They rarely spo
d the meal was nearly over
oked at Lim inquiringly and said

"I saw you go over to the Batis
g. Some business matter, I

use, she asked, "Were you succ

"It was connected with my ov
plied the Count, curtly.

"I suppose from your answer
ne of my business."

"The inference is your own,"

Both were silent for a while, t
med: "Did you see Vivienne?"

"She was in the house; you can

The Countess was cut by the last

r of speaking had been pleasant,

her son's reply that fired her It

"I believe I have the most impu

"I am sure that I have the most

his well-protected adversary. So in a lingual battle, the one who keeps his temper, who does not allow his voice to rise above an ordinary pitch, is the soldier with the long sword.

It must not be supposed that Countess Mont d'Oro allowed these thoughts to pass through her mind. She replied promptly to her son's sarcastic allusion to her love for him.

"Why should I love you?" she cried. "Even when a child you had an ungovernable temper, and since you have grown up—I will not say since you became a man—your extravagance, your disregard of my wishes, even the slightest of them—has driven from my heart any love that I might have had for you. I am glad that your father lived long enough to understand you. He did wisely in leaving all to me. I was to make you an allowance at my discretion. I have paid your debts—gambling debts, I suppose they were principally—until my own income is greatly impaired."

"And why have you been so generous?" asked her son.

"To avoid scandal. I did not wish our family affairs to become a subject for Parisian gossip. I do not care for what is said here in Corsica, but such news travels fast."

"I presume from what you have said that you intend to cut off my allowance?"

"I do, as soon as you are married to Vivienne Batis-telli. You must remember that I am not yet forty—I may marry again, and I do not wish my husband to have a dowerless bride."

The Count smiled grimly. "It is all right for me to become a pensioner on my wife's bounty?"

"Under the circumstances, yes," said the Countess. "She will have enough. She will have all, and it is right she should. The property has been in Pascal's hands for the past eighteen years, and a man of his dis-

position has not let any of it slip through his fingers, of that you may be sure. He has enough to set up for himself, and I suppose there are plenty of women who would have him, disagreeable as he is."

"Why not marry him yourself?" asked the Count. "You would then be placed above all possible fear of want."

The Countess arose from her chair. She did not speak until she reached the door of the dining-room; then she turned: "It is some time since you asked your last question, but I suppose you would like an answer. Considering my experience as your mother, I have no desire to become your sister-in-law."

As his mother closed the door Count Napier sprang to his feet and began whistling the melody of a French *chanson*. "I may have a bad temper, but I think I know where I got it," he muttered, as he made his way to the stables.

His favorite saddle-horse, Apollo, was soon rearing and making a cut at the stable-boy with his whip toward him for his tardiness, and bestowing another on the animal to show him that a master held the reins; dashed off towards Ajaccio.

When he returned, several hours later, the force of his mother's wrath, to a great extent, had burned off. She was in a more complacent mood and said naturally: "Where have you been, Napier?"

"Perhaps Apollo could tell you. I really don't remember."

He went up to his room.

The night of the same day brought little sleep to the eyes of Vivienne Batistelli. She would doze, and the half-sleep came unpleasant dreams. And during the night she was led to the altar by Count d'Oro, but just as the words were to be spoken which would have united their lives forever, he changed into the form of a dragon, or something equally

and she awoke with a scream to find herself in bed, her heart beating violently, and the room filled with shadows which carried almost as much terror to her heart as the visions which she had seen in her dreams.

At last her mental torture became unbearable. She arose and dressed herself. Drawing aside the heavy curtains, she saw that the sun was nearly up. She went into the garden. The dew lay thick upon the grass. She knelt down upon the green carpet. How cool it seemed to her hands, which were burning as with fire. She walked along one of the paths and the cool morning breeze refreshed her. Hearing the sound of a spade against a rock, she turned into a side path.

"It's early ye are in gettin' up," said Terence, the gardener. "Ye may belave me or not, but whin ye turned into the path I thought the sun was up for sure."

Vivienne could not help smiling. "Ah, Terence, you are a great flatterer, like all of your countrymen. Do you say such pretty things to Snodine, your wife?"

"Well, I did before we wuz married and some time afther, but to spake the truth, I sometimes think that Snodine's good-nature sun has set and I'm afeared it 'll never come up again."

"Oh," said Vivienne, "Snodine is not such a bad wife. She has a sharp tongue, to be sure."

"Ah, ah, that she has; and if she wud only use it in the garden instid of on me, your brother would not have to buy so many spades."

Vivienne was not disposed to continue the conversation, and after walking to the end of a long path, made her way back without again coming in contact with Terence. As she approached the house she found that her old nurse, Clarine, was up. She must have seen Vivienne, for she threw open the window of her room, on the ground floor, and gave the young girl a cheery good-morning.

"May I come in?" asked Vivienne.

Clarine ran to open the door, and as Vivienne entered she took the young girl in her arms and kissed her. "Can you come in? You know you can. Whenever you wish to see Clarine, you may always come without the asking. I served your father and your grandfather, and I will serve you as long as I live," and the old lady made a curtsy to intensify the effect of her words.

"I want to talk with you, Clarine," said Vivienne. "I am in great trouble."

"Trouble!" cried Clarine. "There is enough trouble falling upon the house of Batistelli without it being visited upon your innocent head. What is the matter, darling?" and she drew the young girl towards her. "But we cannot talk here. Come my room, and we will sit down and you can tell me about it."

"Why," exclaimed Vivienne, as they entered the room, "Old Manassa is here."

"Yes," said Clarine, "the very minute I am dressed he insists upon coming in and sitting in that arm-chair. I suppose if I gave it to him he would not be so anxious to visit me, but I won't do it. It belonged to my grandfather. I was taken sick once and he sent me in a chair to me because it was so comfortable. When he was better he gave it to me and nothing would induce me to part with it, or even let it go out of my sight. I don't worry about him, Vivienne, for he is asleep."

With her head pillowed upon the breast of the nurse, who had been a mother to her so far as she had her power, Vivienne told of her interview with her brother, and how determined he was that she should marry Count Mont d'Oro.

"Oh, what shall I do, Clarine?"

The old nurse pursed her lips and shook her head.

wisely. "Become engaged to him. Engagements and marriages are two different things, Vivienne."

"Oh, I could not do that, Clarine. I could not make a promise that I did not intend to keep."

"I would not ask you to," said Clarine. "You can intend to keep it, but circumstances may prevent you."

Then Vivienne told of the fearful dreams she had had during the night.

"Oh, I can never do it," she cried. "I will never marry Count Mont d'Oro. They say, do they not, Clarine, that Manuel Della Coscia killed my father?"

"All Corsica believes it," said Clarine, and she crossed herself reverently.

"Now, listen, Clarine; if the son of Manuel Della Coscia asked my hand in marriage, I would give it to him as soon as to Count Napier."

Old Manassa had been leaning upon the head of his heavy stick. It fell from his hands to the floor with a crash.

"Why, what was that?" he cried. "Didn't I hear somebody talking? I thought I heard the name of Manuel Della Coscia."

"Nonsense, Manassa!" cried Clarine. "You have been at your old trick of dreaming and then waking up and thinking your dream was real. Now, go right to sleep again. You cannot have your breakfast for an hour yet."

"I am sure he heard everything that we have said," Vivienne whispered in Clarine's ear.

"Oh, no, he is always like that, but even if he did hear, I will convince him that he dreamt it."

"Come into the garden, Clarine. I do not wish to say anything that can be overheard."

At some distance from the house they sat upon a bench beneath the drooping branches of a tree which formed a natural arbour.

"I have something to tell you, Vivienne," said

Clarine. "I had a dream, too, last night, but a good thing about my dreams—they always come true and it was about you."

"My fate must have been pleasanter than it is to be," said Vivienne, "judging from your marriage."

"Listen, Vivienne," said Clarine, "you are not for yourself. I thought you were betrothed to a man whom you did not love and you were very happy; then a stranger came; he was young and handsome and your heart went out to him. He met Count d'Oro and they quarrelled—they fought—they were killed and you married the stranger."

"How foolish, Clarine! But you know that dreams go by contraries."

As they walked back to the house, Clarine said, "Take my advice, Vivienne, and tell the Count that you will marry him. You must trust in the Lord. Your Heavenly Father doeth all things well—be it as he will be."

Old Manassa had not been sleeping. He had heard what had passed between Vivienne and Pascal. Immediately after they had gone into the garden, he made his way to his master's room. He found Count d'Oro alone.

"Ah, this is a sad day for the house of Batistelli," he cried. "She is unworthy of the name."

"Why, what has happened now?" asked Pascal.

"I heard her say it—your sister Vivienne."

"I heard her say what?" cried Pascal. "You speak out and not stand mumbling there!"

"I heard her say that she would as soon marry the son of Manuel Della Coscia as give her hand to Count Mont d'Oro. It is true. I heard it. I did."

Pascal took a silver coin from his purse and went towards Manassa.

"I see, you must be out of tobacco; but I

eyes shut and your ears open and tell me all you hear. Is your gin bottle empty yet?"

"Not quite," said Manassa.

"I am obliged to you for telling me what you heard," said Pascal, "but go now; I am busy."

The old man shambled towards the door. As he went out he muttered to himself: "She is unworthy of the name of Batistelli."

Some hours later Vivienne was again walking in the garden. She knew that the Count was coming to see her—she knew what he was going to say—she knew what her answer was expected to be. She determined that the interview should not take place within-doors. Since talking with Clarine, she had prayed fervently for Heavenly guidance, and it seemed to her that it would come more quickly, more directly, if she were in the garden with the trees, the flowers, and the birds about her, and the blue sky overhead.

The greater part of Vivienne's education had been drawn from nature. She had learned little from books or from contact with others. Her life had been circumscribed in many ways, and such a life makes one introspective. The dweller in a large city who has so much to attract, to interest him and take up his time, who gets but a glimpse of the sky between the house-tops, becomes superficial and does little deep thinking; but one who lives in the country, largely apart from his fellow man, who sees the wide expanse of heaven every day, feels as though he were closer to the Great Power—thinks more of the future and looks searchingly into his own heart, seeking to determine his probable fate when his good deeds and bad deeds, his sins of omission and commission, are scanned by the great Judge.

"And how is Mademoiselle Batistelli this beautiful morning?" asked Count Napier.

Vivienne, startled from her reverie, quickly decided

that he should not come to the point at once. She knew his forceful manner of speech, and determined not to allow her heart to be carried by storm. She answered

"I am not well—not sick, but worried. Julien was out all night. What will the end be?"

"Oh, he'll get married some time and settle down."

"And who would have him—a drunkard? I should pity her from the bottom of my heart."

"You look at the matter too seriously," said the Count. "Most men are drunkards—some with wine some with women, but more with love. I was talking to your brother Pascal yesterday about our future."

Vivienne clasped her hands and looked into his face appealingly.

"We can have no future together, Count Mondoro; I do not love you."

"Well, as to that," cried the Count, jauntily; "neither do I love you, but I respect and admire you."

The appealing look left Vivienne's face; in its place came an expression of determination.

"I wish to be loved—by my husband."

"You must have been reading English novels," said the Count. "In them you will find the word 'love' but we have nothing like it in French. It may be that the word 'love' has no exact counterpart in our language. You must be content, as most Frenchwomen are, with the love of your children."

"No, no," cried Vivienne. "If they are no offspring of love, they will have no love. It is too a risk."

"We must take risks in this life," said the Count. "I will take you to Paris with me. You can see for yourself there; it is so different from this dull place."

He had tried the old form of temptation. Faust had won Marguerite; but Vivienne was a sterner stuff.

"I care nothing for Paris or its sinful life; your mother has told me of it. I love my home—every stone in this old castle is dear to me, and my heart will always be here."

"Ah," said the Count, "I understand you. Your husband must be content to live here and never go to Paris."

"If he loves me as I shall love him, he will be content to stay here with me."

Count Napier Mont d'Oro felt sure that his mother intended to cut off his allowance when he became the husband of Vivienne; in fact, she might do so even if that event did not take place. Thrown upon his own resources, he knew his only means of existence would be the gambling-table. He was wild, ungovernable, criminal in many ways, but he did not look forward with unmixed pleasure to a sinful life. He was honest with himself in that he knew he thought more of the rich Batistelli estates than of the fair young girl who bore the name. He thoroughly believed in *laissez-faire*. His philosophy was very much like that of Clarine; take a step that does not exactly please you and trust that fate will so order your future that you will not be obliged to take another like it.

Apparently dropping conversation on the subject uppermost in their minds, he said: "I am going back to Paris, but for a little while only. I have some business matters there to attend to—I mean to close up. Then I am coming back to Corsica to settle down. After all, I think you are right; Parisian life is like fireworks—there is a snap and a go and a very pretty sight for a few minutes, and then it is all over. But the life of a country gentleman is solid and substantial. What more can a man ask in this world than a faithful and trusting wife and beautiful and loving children? As these pictures pass before my eyes, I know which one is the best and which is better for me, but before I go I

wish to be sure of something that will overcome all temptation to stay in Paris, something to bring me back. You know, sometimes the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

"Your mother," uttered Vivienne.

"No, yourself," cried the Count.

"But you do not love me!"

"I have said that I did not, but I will say more—I love no one else."

Vivienne was in a quandary. What should she do? Her own mind seemed powerless to direct her, and almost in a state of despair she recalled the advice Clarine had given.

Forcing a smile she turned towards the Count. "If I promise to marry you, Count, if before I become yours you see another whom you will love, will you come to me and tell me? No, no, I will not ask that; but if I learn that you do love some one else, it is understood and agreed that the knowledge of that fact will free me from the carrying out of my promise?"

"Oh, yes," said the Count, "I agree to that willingly; it is but fair that I should." He took her hand in his, raised it to his lips and kissed it. "This is the bond," he cried; "you are to be mine. I am the happiest man in Corsica."

"Do not say that," cried Vivienne. "You have no right to utter those words until I look into your face and say that I am the happiest woman in Corsica."

Shortly after Vivienne had given her promise to the Count, he made his way to her brother.

"It is all right," he cried. "It was a hard fight, but my eloquence won; she has promised to be my wife."

"But when?" asked Pascal.

"Oh, I did not go so far as to fix the date. That is usually left to the lady, you know."

"But it must be soon," said Pascal. "There are weighty reasons."

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The Count thought of his mother's reference to his allowance. "Yes, there are," he replied. "We must use our combined eloquence to fix the marriage for an early day."

In the afternoon, while walking in the garden, Pascal met Old Manassa.

"She has promised to marry him. Manassa, you are an old fool. You should have been in your grave long ago."

The old man straightened up; his eyes flashed. "I shall not die until I see Manuel Della Coscia, who murdered your father, weltering in his own blood."

CHAPTER III.

"PYLADES AND ORESTES."

"ARE you going, Vic?"

"Of course I am going. I have been ordered to join Admiral Sir Hugh Walter's flagship, which sails for Halifax in a week."

"I do not mean that. What I want to know is whether you are going to Buckholme with me. I met Clarence Glynne on the Strand yesterday, and he gave me a most cordial invitation to come out. He extended it to me in the name of his father, Miss Renville, and himself."

"That was more than a double-header, Jack," said Victor; "that was three of a kind."

"I hope you won't consider me egotistical, Victor, but I really think from what he said that she was the instigator of the invitation."

The one addressed as Victor was silent for a moment. He cast his eyes downward as though thinking the matter over. At last he said:

"Why should I go, Jack? It was you who jumped into the river and saved her life, for she sank twice, you will remember. Besides, when she learns that you are the Honourable John De Vinne, and likely to become—I beg your pardon—Viscount De Vinne, what chance will there be for me?"

"Yes," cried Jack, oblivious of his friend's remark, "the whole picture comes back to me so vividly. What an idiot that fellow was to run into her boat—and then he was going to let her drown because he could not swim. He was near enough to row up and pull her into

his boat when she came up the first time. Of course I had to swim for it, and dive too. I think a man who cannot steer a boat and cannot swim should stay on land."

"Those are my sentiments—exactly," remarked Victor.

The recalling of the event—the rescue from drowning of Miss Bertha Renville by Mr. Jack De Vinne—had such an effect upon the young man that he was in a very excitable condition.

"You might have been the one, Vic, to have saved her instead of me. To be fair about it we should have drawn lots, but, as you say, there was no time to lose. Although the affair happened a month ago, it seems as though it were but yesterday. It seemed a profanation, but we had to treat her just as though she were a man instead of a woman. You ran to get a trap and we took her to the tavern and called a doctor, then, when she was once more herself, we drove to Buckholme with her."

"You've got it by heart," said Victor. "Do you remember as well what took place at Buckholme? How delighted Clarence was and the half-hearted thanks of Mr. Glynne, Miss Renville's guardian? What a roly-poly sort of a man he is.

"I was not taken with his outward appearance, and if I am any sort of a judge of human nature, I should say that he houses a bad heart within that portly frame."

"I must confess, Vic, that I did not notice the man much. I was thinking of her; how close she had been to death, and how glad I was to have been the means of saving her life. I will be honest with you, Vic, and own up—I am in love with her. She is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen and I want to ask your advice. What do you know about me, Victor?"

Victor Duquesne leaned back in his chair and

laughed. "Well, Jack, I know that you are the second son of an earl—I really do not know his full title—but in England, you know, the second son of an earl is a mere nobody if his elder brother enjoys good health."

"You have hit it just right, Victor," said Jack. "I am really a nobody; that's why I went into the Navy, but I hope you won't take that remark as a personal reflection. There are a great many smart men in the Navy, and you are one of them."

"Thanks, Jack. We are and always have been the best of friends. I hope I shall serve my king faithfully and well, and be worthy of your good opinion. But I fancy you are going to tell me something about yourself, for some reason or other known to you, but at the present time, unknown to me."

"Well, listen," said Jack. "I am the second son of the Earl of Noxton. My father obtained considerable reputation in a political way when he was Lord De Vinne, and although ten years have passed since he succeeded to the Earldom, he prefers, for some reason or other, to be known as Lord De Vinne. Even my mother thinks that 'Lady De Vinne' is a prouder title than 'Countess Noxton.' My father's name is Carolus. I think he has told me at least a hundred times how one of his ancestors came over with William of Normandy, and the name Carolus has always been borne by the heir to the title."

"I agree with your father and mother," said Victor. "I should prefer a title which I had won or upon which I had conferred some honour, rather than one simply bequeathed to me."

Jack continued: "My mother was a poor girl and, they say, very beautiful. She can bring forward neither of her sons, however, as evidence of that fact. Her name is Caroline. I have sometimes fancied that its similarity to Carolus had no small influence with my father. Now, to come to the point. My brother

Carolus, who is five years older than I, is engaged to Lady Angeline Ashmont. He has been an invalid for some years and is now in Germany, taking the baths."

"A temporary illness, I hope," said Victor.

"I do not know," said Jack. "He has been a great student, and instead of riding horseback and hunting and swimming, as I have done all my life, he stayed cooped up in his den working, I believe, on the genealogy of the family. He is as thin as a rail and as white as a ghost."

"He has been overworking," suggested Victor.

"Perhaps so," said Jack; "time thrown away, I have always told him. When he inherits, which will be some years from now, for my paternal is as tough as a knot, I suppose I shall have a small allowance from him. I shall go into the Navy for a few years—maybe for life. I wish we could go on the same ship."

"So do I," said Victor.

The two young men were old friends; they had attended the same schools together, and together had received their naval training. Their regard for each other had been so marked that their fellows had dubbed them "Pylades and Orestes." Neither had been called upon to suffer or die for the other, but the tie that bound them was so strong that, had it been put to the test, either would have proved himself worthy of his ancient namesake.

Jack gave a long, deep sigh.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Victor. "Are you thinking of Miss Renville?"

"No, Victor, of you. What happy years we have passed together; and now our ways part. You have forged ahead of me and are now a lieutenant, while I—poor Jack—with inferior ability, have to be content with lower rank! You deserve the good fortune, Vic, but your friends must have great influence with the Admiralty."

"I have no friends," said Victor; "only one—you, Jack. The reason for my appointment is as inexplicable to me as it is to you. Of course I had a mother, but my father never spoke of her. I have not seen him for twelve years—since I was ten years old, when he put me to school—the one where I first met you. My expenses have been paid, but no word of any kind has come from him."

"He is a man of mystery," said Jack, "but nearly all mysteries are cleared up in time, and I have no doubt yours will be. By the way, what is the name of Sir Hugh's flagship?"

"Strange, is it not, Jack, she is called the *Orestes*; so you see I shall have a constant reminder of our past friendship."

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot," hummed Jack. Then he cried: "Come, Victor, we must go back to first principles; say yes or no—will you come to Buckholme with me?"

Victor hesitated. "Well—perhaps. Do you know, I have thought, Jack, that Mr. Glynne may have spoken to the Admiralty about me. You know he is in the iron and steel trade and is brought into business relations with them. Yes, I will go. I will try to find out whether he had anything to do with it. If he had, although he does remind me of a small elephant every time I look at him, I will give him a credit mark for his kindness."

The conversation just narrated took place at Victor Duquesne's apartments in London. As he had told Jack, his bills had been paid regularly and his allowance had not been a niggardly one. This enabled him to have a sitting-room and a chamber, and he could have afforded a valet had he been so disposed.

"You must not back out of your promise, Victor," said Jack, as he extended his hand; "shake! That settles it. You are booked for Buckholme."

"And you for Bertha," said Victor, and they both laughed.

At that moment there was a light tap on the door.

"Come in," cried the two young men together.

The door was opened for a short distance and the face of an untidy maid-of-all-work, with unkempt hair, appeared.

"Come in," again cried Victor.

"I don't care to," said the slavey. "I don't look well enough, and Mrs. Launders said if I dared go in she'd give it to me when I got back."

"What do you want?" asked Victor, somewhat impatiently.

"I've got a letter for you," said Sarah, the slavey, "and if you'll excuse me, I'll throw it in and you can pick it up."

Suiting the action to the word, the letter flew high in the air and then fell to the floor. Sarah slammed the door, and her heavy boots were heard clattering upon the stairs all the way down.

Victor sprang forward and picked up the letter. He looked first at the postmark. "Ajaccio," he cried. "It is from Corsica. I am not acquainted with any person there." He held the sealed letter in his hand and regarded it.

"Never fool with a letter," cried Jack. "Cut it open, tear it open, and know the best or worst as soon as possible. To me, a man who is afraid to open a letter is like a gambler who is uncertain whether to stake his last shilling or not."

"This is my letter, Jack, and I propose to regard the outside of it as long as I choose before perusing its contents."

Although the words had a sharpness in them, there was a look in Victor's eye as he spoke which robbed them of any intention to offend.

"All right, old boy," said Jack. "Don't let me

hurry you. Why not leave it on your table until you get back from Buckholme? My father is a man of wisdom. He has a large correspondence, but he never gets ready to answer his letters until they are about six months old. During that time he says half of them have been answered by the course of events, and it is too late to answer the others; so in that way he has not gained a very wide reputation as a letter-writer."

Victor broke the seal, unfolded the sheet, and spread it carefully on the table before him. Reading it through quickly, he cried:

"Jack listen to this:

"MY DEAR VICTOR: Come to Corsica at once. When you reach Ajaccio, I will communicate with you secretly by messenger. Hear all, but say nothing. See Admiral Enright and sail with him on the *Osprey*.

"Your father,

"HECTOR DUQUESNE."

Victor laid the letter upon the table, and as he brought his hand down forcibly upon it, he cried: "Now, what does that mean, Jack?"

"It's just as plain as the nose on your face, Victor. It was your father who got the appointment for you. Tom Ratcliffe is going with Enright, who is ordered to cruise in the Mediterranean. Corsica, unless my geographical knowledge is twisted, is in the Mediterranean; so you see your father has fixed things all right."

Victor sprang to his feet. "Then I must see Enright at once. Whether I go to Buckholme or not depends upon when he sails."

That evening Victor was at Jack's rooms.

"I have got my transfer, Jack," he cried as he entered the room.

"Lucky boy," was Jack's comment, "everything goes your way."



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"I don't think it would have," said Victor, "but upon one occasion when Admiral Enright visited the Naval Academy, he was accompanied by his daughter, Miss Helen. For some reason or other, probably on account of my well-known affability, I was detailed to escort her and show her the great attractions of the Academy. I could not find him to-day at the Admiralty and was obliged to go to his house. I met Miss Helen, and I am sure it was her influence that carried the day. We sail on Monday. To-day is Thursday; so you see, my dear Jack, Buckholme becomes an impossibility."

"Then I must go alone," said Jack. After another long sigh: "My fate lies there—I love Bertha Renville, and I know, if an opportunity offers, that I shall ask her to be my wife."

"Do you leave early in the morning?" asked Victor.

"Yes, by the 7.30. I wish to get there early, for I shall ask her to go boating with me. There is no place like a boat for propounding momentous questions. Nobody to watch you, and only the little fishes to overhear what you say."

"Well, Jack," said Victor, as their hands met at parting, "you have my best wishes and my sincerest hopes for your happiness and success in life."

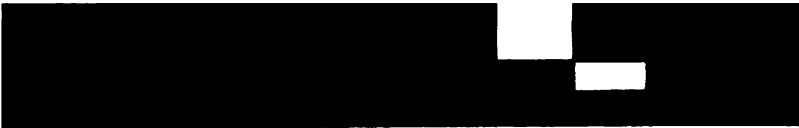
"The same to you, old boy," cried Jack.

They spoke no more, but when they stood by the open door, as though prompted by some instinct which they could not resist, they threw their arms about each other and stood for a moment in a brotherly embrace.

Victor ran swiftly down the stairs and walked homeward so fast that his fellow pedestrians looked after him, some with curiosity and others with suspicion.

Jack threw himself into an arm-chair, lighted his pipe, and smoked unremittingly for an hour.

The next morning he was not surprised to find that he had gone to bed without extinguishing the gas.



CHAPTER IV.

"BUCKHOLME."

JACK DE VINNE, with all the impatience of youth, was at the railway station half an hour before the starting time of the train which was to bear him to the woman he loved. He walked impatiently up and down the platform. Finally, he accosted a guard. "When will the Reading train be in?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied the man. "Sometimes it's early, and sometimes it's late, and sometimes it's just on time."

Jack thanked the man for the valuable information and resumed his walk. His next act was to buy a morning paper and tuck it beneath the straps of his valise. Never did time pass so slowly. He was sure it must be half-past seven, but upon looking at his watch he found that he had been in the station only ten minutes.

While standing uncertain, irresolute, dissatisfied, a hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder, and turning quickly, he met the gaze of Victor Duquesne.

"Why, what brought you here, old boy?" he exclaimed.

"A fool's errand, I suppose you will say, when I tell you what I came for. I was up early this morning, and the thought came to me that I had not told you to write to me if anything important occurred. Send the letter to Ajaccio, Island of Corsica. I do not know how long we shall stay at Malta, but from something I heard Helen say to her father, I think there is some reason for the Admiral's visiting Corsica as soon as possible after his arrival in the Mediterranean. I select

Ajaccio, because the letter will go direct by French post."

"Glad you told me," said Jack. "I write about two letters a year, and the chances are I should have addressed yours care of the Mediterranean Sea, and should have expected it to find you. I'm mighty glad to see you, too. I feel as though I had been waiting here a couple of hours," he looked at his watch again, "but it has been only fifteen minutes. Ah, here's the train now. Well, good-bye, old boy. Remember I am always your Pylades."

"And I am your Orestes," declared Victor. "Perhaps the time may come when one or both of us may be called upon to show the depth of friendship that lies in him."

Once more the men shook hands. Then Jack grasped his luggage, which was of small compass, and made his way to a seat in a first-class carriage.

For some time after the train started, Jack sat preoccupied with his thoughts. The word "thought" would be more correct, for he had but one, and that was of Bertha Renville. How would she receive him? Had he been deceived by the manner in which Clarence had extended the invitation? Did Mr. Thomas Glynn really wish him to come to Buckholme? He framed question after question in his mind, but to none could he supply a satisfactory answer. He pulled the morning paper from under the strap of his valise and looked listlessly at one page after another. He was not interested in the Court Calendar, for, beautiful as she was, he could not expect to find Bertha's name there. The business and the financial columns were passed unheeded. He started to read an editorial, but after glancing at the first few lines, crumpled the paper in his hand and looked out of the window.

It was a beautiful morning and nature was in her fairest garb. As the train passed through well-known

places, memories came back to him of many happy times passed there with his friend Victor. But Jack was not an ardent lover of nature, and he soon turned again to the newspaper.

A headline caught his eye: "Attempted Robbery at Brixton, Strange Death of the Burglar." The caption was so attractive that Jack read the article through:

"A Mrs. Elizabeth Nason, widow, living on Oad Street, Brixton, was awakened early yesterday morning by the loud cackling of the fowls in her hennery, a small out-building in the rear of the house. She lives alone, her only protector being a large mastiff, which she kept within-doors at night. Upon hearing the commotion she went to the window and, peeping between the curtains, saw that a man had broken open the door of the hennery, had strangled a number of the fowls, which lay upon the turf beside him, and was endeavouring to secure others. She went quietly downstairs, called to the dog that was asleep in the kitchen, and opening the side door, led him into the garden. She bolted the door again, ran quickly upstairs, and looked out to see what would take place.

"The dog, knowing what was expected of him, ran towards the man, with jaws distended. A terrific battle between man and dog then took place, the following description of which was given to our reporter by Mrs. Nason:

"The man sprang to his feet, and Mrs. Nason saw, what she had not at first observed, that he had with him a large umbrella. As the dog sprang at him, the man grasped the umbrella by both ends and forced it, laterally, between the dog's jaws. True to his nature, the dog shut his teeth firmly upon it. The man was of small stature, slight in build, and was thrown to the ground by the impact. That fall, undoubtedly, saved his life, for the time being, at least, for his hand came in



contact with a heavy oaken bar which had been used to fasten the hennery door. While the dog was busily engaged trying to disengage his teeth from the umbrella, into which they had been firmly set, the man sprang to his feet and dealt the dog a stunning blow with the stick. The dog soon rallied, however, and the man, apparently fearing another attack, became frenzied, drew from his pocket a clasp knife with a blade fully six inches in length, and stabbed the animal viciously in both eyes. The maddened dog rose upon his hind legs, preparatory to springing upon his assailant, who improved the opportunity to stab the dog in the throat.

“Mrs. Nason could bear the scene no longer and turned from the window. Recovering her self-possession, she looked again and saw the man lying face downward, the body of the dog beneath him.

“She ran from the house to that of a neighbour, a Mr. Abraham Dowse, who, arming himself with a pitchfork, accompanied her to the scene of the conflict. He found that both man and dog were dead. The police were then called.

“The man was shabbily dressed, had no money upon his person, and the only means of identification was a letter addressed to Alberto Cordoni. The letter was postmarked Ajaccio and was more than six months old. It read as follows:

“A. C. You have been in London now for more than a year, but to no avail. If you had found any trace of Manuel Della Coscia, I would be willing to give you ten times what you have already received; but I shall send you no more money until you give me some proof that you are on his track.

“The letter itself was without date or signature. The body of the man, who was apparently an Italian or Corsican, was taken in charge by the police.”

“What a bloodthirsty set those Corsicans are,” said Jack to himself. “I wonder why Victor’s father wants

him to go to that God-forsaken country. When I get back to London I will send this paper to Victor," and he folded and replaced it beneath the straps of his valise.

The train was now approaching Windsor, the abode of royalty. Although Jack had the blood of the aristocracy in his veins, he was not interested in either castle or park. His thoughts were several miles beyond.

There was one place through which he was to pass which one cannot visit unmoved. Jack looked earnestly from the window. Yes, there it was, the village church of Stoke Pogis, and close to it the churchyard in which Gray wrote his immortal Elegy.

Jack was not a great lover of poetry, for, as he had expressed himself, "translating Greek poetry into English verse is enough to make a man sick of it for life." But Victor had admired the elegy and had read it aloud several times to Jack, who now recalled one of the stanzas:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

It is strange what unexpected comparisons lovers will make. He did not think of Bertha as being a gem in some ocean cave, but the thought did occur to him that it was not just the thing for so beautiful a girl to lived unnoticed in the little town of Maidenhead when the frequenters of London drawing-rooms would have gone wild over her and where she would be the belle of the season. Then the thought came to him that he did not wish her to be the belle of the season; he wished her to be his, his only, thus adding another proof to the adage that true love is selfish, which selfishness, carried to extremes, becomes the green-eyed monster, jealousy.

Jack leaned back in his seat and began wondering what his future would be. His life could not fail to



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be happy if Bertha promised to be his wife. Should he become a statesman, as had his father, or—but he would not think of that now.

He could see the great stone bridge which spans the Thames at Maidenhead, forming a means of communication between the County of Berkshire and that of Buckingham. Then he remembered that he had read of the old wooden bridge which spanned the river, and how the Duke of Surrey and the followers of Richard II. had at that bridge held the soldiers of Henry IV. at bay for hours, and then made a safe retreat.

They were nearing the station. Jack's heart gave a great jump. Yes, that was the place where Miss Renville's boat had been run down and capsized, and there she would have met her death had it not been for—yes, Fate must have willed that he should be there in time to save her.

Mr. Thomas Glynne, who, with his son, Clarence, a young man of twenty-four, formed the firm known in the city as Walmonth & Company, iron and steel merchants, was a short, thick-set man, with a round face and an expression of the utmost geniality. While business manager for Walmonth & Company he had lived, as he expressed it, “in smoky, dirty London,” but after becoming head of the firm, he made up his mind to have a country residence. He had looked North, South, East, and West before fixing upon a location, and finally decided to make his home in the little town of Maidenhead, the scenery surrounding which is picturesque and beautiful. Here he built a house of the conventional type, to which he had given the name of “Buckholme.” Had he been asked why he had thus named it, he probably would have replied: “Do you know anybody who has a house with that name?”

Some fourteen years before, when Mr. Glynne was about forty, the house of Walmonth & Company was in financial straits. Mr. Glynne, who had gone to Paris

on business connected with the firm, was suddenly recalled by an urgent telegram, and on his return to London, the senior member of the house, Mr. Jonas Walmonth, informed him that the firm was unable to meet its obligations and would be forced to assign. This action was averted, however, for by some means, unknown to Mr. Jonas Walmonth and his brother Ezra, Mr. Glynne raised sufficient money to pay the outstanding liabilities and thus secured a controlling interest in the firm. The two Walmonth brothers were old bachelors, and two years after Mr. Glynne became the "Co.," Ezra died suddenly of heart disease, while Jonas, broken in body and mind, was sent to a sanatorium, from which he never emerged. No heirs came to claim the third interest belonging to the Walmonth brothers, and Mr. Glynne did not take special pains to find any. When his son Clarence became of age he was taken into the firm. He showed great aptitude for the business, and during the past year the senior partner had made few visits to the city. "What's the use?" he said. "I have been in the traces for more than thirty years; the business runs itself, and all that Clarence has to do is to fill orders and collect bills. Besides, I see him once a week, and if he wants my advice, I am always ready to give it."

Thomas Glynne had two passions; one was his love of flowers, and the other, the greater one, his love of money. Amply favoured as to the latter, he found great enjoyment in gratifying his love for floriculture. Visitors came from far and near to view the beautiful plants in his greenhouses and conservatory. It was a mystery to his associates in the trade as to how he had become possessed of enough money to buy out the Walmonth Brothers, build his beautiful house, and spend such extravagant sums for orchids and other rare plants.

It was no mystery to Mr. Thomas Glynne. He could



have told them, had he wished, that when in Paris, at the time the urgent telegram was sent him by his employers, he had met with a most wonderful experience.

An English gentleman named Oscar Renville was engaged in the iron and steel business in Paris, and it was with him that Mr. Glynne, representing the Walmonth Brothers, transacted a very large business and with whom he was on most intimate terms of friendship. Mr. Renville was a widower, as was Mr. Glynne, for both had lost their wives a few years after marriage. Mr. Renville had one child, a beautiful little girl named Bertha.

One afternoon Mr. Glynne had gone to Mr. Renville's office on business, and found the establishment in a state of great excitement. Mr. Renville had been stricken with apoplexy, and the clerks were debating what they should do, at the time of Mr. Glynne's arrival. There was nothing undecided about Mr. Glynne. Mr. Renville was placed in a carriage and Mr. Glynne accompanied him home; nor did he leave his friend until he saw his body placed at rest in *Père la Chaise*.

Shortly before his death, Mr. Renville had made and signed a will by which Mr. Thomas Glynne was constituted the guardian of his only child and heiress, and given full control of her property until the time of her marriage.

Had Mr. Glynne's associates in trade known this fact, it would, probably, have relieved the feeling of wonderment they entertained concerning his financial transactions.

It also evidences the fact that Mr. Glynne had no difficulty in satisfying his passion for flowers. He, however, did have some difficulty, or feared that he might have, in satisfying his love for money.

He knew that he was in undisputed possession of Bertha's fortune, which amounted to about £40,000. But what was he to do when Bertha married and he

was obliged to transfer the fortune to its rightful owner? There was one point in his favour, and a great one. Neither Bertha nor any one else knew that she had a fortune; but the fact might come out at some time or other, and Thomas Glynne, being a bad man at heart, was in wholesome fear of the law, which he knew dealt rigorously with those who betrayed a trust such as he had accepted.

He had formed three plans which would enable him to keep the money under his control. The first was to bring about a marriage between Bertha and his son Clarence. The second plan, in case the first proved impossible, was to prevent her marrying any one else. The third plan, if she persisted in forming a matrimonial alliance, was to keep possession of the property in some other way, and Mr. Glynne had not decided in his own mind just what that "other way" might be. "It would depend upon circumstances," he said to himself.

Jack De Vinne thought Bertha Renville was beautiful, and she was, judged by the English standard. She was tall and lithe, perfect in form; with glossy hair of a golden tint; blue eyes; cheeks with a touch of pink that enhanced their whiteness, and a Cupid's bow of a mouth, which was usually the home of a bewitching smile. Such a woman as men become heroes for; such a woman, for love of whom, men have died in misery.

When the train drew up at the little station, Jack at once caught sight of Clarence's smiling face, and a moment later he was the recipient of a hearty greeting.

"I do not usually come down until Saturday," said Clarence, "but as I had invited you to become our guest, I arranged matters in the City so that I can stay with you until Monday."

"I am glad to hear it," said Jack. "I am rather bashful, you know, Mr. Glynne, and I'm afraid if you



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had not been here I should have felt like—like—a cat in a strange garret, you know.”

“That’s a very good simile,” remarked Clarence. “By comparing yourself to a cat, I suppose you are looking for a mouse.”

Jack smiled. What did the young man mean? Although he did not speak outright, his looks and words seemed to indicate that he thought Jack was interested in Miss Renville, and Jack had told Victor some things which led him to think that the young lady was more interested in his visit than either the young man or his father.

The night before Jack’s arrival at Buckholme, Mr. Thomas Glynne had informed his son that he wished to have a talk with him in the library after dinner.

Clarence had entered the apartment smoking a cigarette. His father was sitting at a beautifully carved and finely inlaid table.

“Throw that horrible-smelling thing away, Clarence. You know I detest cigarettes.”

“I know you do,” said Clarence, “but I like them. I never smoke during business hours and only one or two after dinner. I know it is a vice, but it is a mild one, and everybody is cognisant of it. There are men who have greater vices, but they conceal them from the public gaze. To oblige you, however, I will forego the pleasure it gives me,” and he threw it into the fireplace.

The father lost no time in bringing the subject he had in mind to his son’s attention.

“You know I am a business man, Clarence, and what I’ve got to say I say right out. I have said it before and to-night I am going to say it again. I want you to marry Bertha Renville.”

“There are only two objections to such a course,” said Clarence, coolly. “In the first place, I do not

love her, and in the second place I am sure she would not have me if I did."

"You love money, don't you?" asked the father, sharply.

"Not for itself," said Clarence. "I have no miserly instincts of which I am aware. I will acknowledge, however, that I love what money will buy."

"Supposing I told you," said the father, "that this marriage was absolutely necessary for financial reasons; that the firm was so deeply involved that it must assign unless more capital is secured at once; what would you say to that?"

Clarence smiled grimly, and there was a sarcastic turn to his lip as he replied: "Well, father, to speak honestly, I should think you had been reading some popular novel, and had learned that portion of it by heart which you have just now repeated. I am led to think this to be the case because the house of Walmonth Brothers, of which I have the honour to be the junior partner, has ten thousand pounds in the bank, with fully twenty thousand pounds in bills receivable, and no large bills payable. So you see, father, the extract from the popular novel is not applicable to our case at all."

Thomas Glynnne arose from his chair, clasped his hands behind his back, a favourite position of his, and walked up and down for some time without speaking. Then he opened the door of one of the bookcases and took down a volume which showed marks of great usage. He approached his son and said, solemnly:

"Clarence, this is your mother's Bible. I am going to tell you something, but you must swear on this book that you will keep what I am going to say to you a secret as long as I wish you to."

"I dislike secrets," said Clarence, "and I do not like to take an oath. I will promise not to mention what you say to me, and with me such a promise is as binding and sacred as an oath."

Mr. Glynne laid the book on the table. "Well, I believe you, Clarence, but remember, I look upon your promise as though it had been an oath." Then after a pause, "Did I ever tell you that my ward, Bertha Renville, is a rich woman?"

"Well, no," said Clarence. "You have never treated her as though she was. Her allowance has been quite moderate and, to tell the truth, I have given her considerable money myself when I knew that she wished certain things, and told me that she could not afford to buy them. No, I never had any idea that she was a rich woman. I always supposed that her father was a poor man, but your friend, and that you, with your well-known kindness of heart, had provided for her out of your own bounty."

"Well," said Mr. Glynne, "I am glad that has been your opinion, and I mean that the rest of the world shall continue to think so. Now, I am going to tell you the truth. The money with which I bought out the firm of Walmonth Brothers—the money with which I built this house—in fact all the money I have used to satisfy my, as you know, fastidious tastes, in reality belongs to Miss Renville. By the terms of her father's will, when she marries, I must turn over the property, with accrued interest, to her, and, of course, to her husband. Now, let me ask you the question I asked when you first came in: Will you marry her and keep this money in the family, or will you refuse to do so and lose everything—business, house——"

"Well," said Clarence, "it seems rather a hard box to put a fellow in, but supposing she wants to marry somebody else?"

The father began to show signs of anger. The genial smile had vanished. "That's not your business, young man. If she doesn't marry you, she shan't marry anybody else; I'll look out for that."

"Well, then," said Clarence, "let us leave her out of

the question and I will answer for myself. I am young and can work. I am sorry for you, for you are getting old and it may come hard on you; but my mind is made up. I do not love Bertha Renville, and whatever the result may be I won't marry her."

The usually genial Mr. Thomas Glynne became livid with rage. "We shall see about that, young man. You shall go out of the firm. I will close up the business. You are an ungrateful cub. I made life easy for you; now go out into the world and find out how hard it is to do anything for yourself."

"That's what I said I was willing to do," said Clarence. "But you won't drive me out of the firm, nor you won't close up the business."

The young man arose to his feet and father and son stood glaring at each other like two wild animals.

"Oh, I won't, won't I?" snarled Mr. Glynne. "How will you keep me from doing it?"

"Your own good sense will keep you from doing it, father," said the young man, cooling down a little. "If you will keep still, I will do the same. There is no exigency, as I see, until there is some danger of her getting married; but if you take any steps to get me out of the firm, or to wind up the business, I shall tell Bertha."

"But you promised you would not."

"I know I did," said Clarence, "but there is an old saying that a bad promise is better broken than kept. If you have told me the truth, you are entitled to invest her money and to look after it until her marriage. When that time comes you have either got to restore the property to its rightful owner or keep it yourself and become a criminal in the eyes of the law. In that case, I shall be sorry that my name is Glynne. I hope this very uncomfortable and unpleasant interview is at an end. May I be allowed to light another cigarette? My

nerves are a trifle shaken by this unexpected disclosure."

The young man suited the action to the word, blew a puff of smoke, and then said: "I suppose this is all, father. Good-night. I will keep your secret as long as you respect my rights."

When his son had gone, Thomas Glynne clenched his fists and stamped his foot upon the library floor, but the rich Wilton was thick and gave forth no sound.

"Clarence is a fool. But she shall not marry any one else. If she dies, all will be mine. I am sorry I told him, but I trust it will bring him to terms. If he did not know it, no one would be the wiser."

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL OF NOXTON.

SATURDAY morning was cloudy.

"I am so glad the sun is not shining to-day," remarked Jack, as the little party took their seats at the breakfast table.

"Why so?" asked Bertha, and she cast an inquiring glance at the speaker.

"Because it will be so much better for fishing, and I never like to fish unless I catch something."

"I see," remarked Bertha, "you are a practical angler, not a political one."

"Exactly," said Jack. "I remember reading somewhere the definition of a person who fishes for compliments."

"The answer to that must be a joke," said Clarence.

Jack laughed. "Something near. I think it was this: A man who fishes for compliments is one who uses himself for bait."

At this they laughed, Mr. Thomas Glynne the loudest of them all.

After breakfast Bertha said: "You must come with me, Mr. De Vinne, and see Guardy's beautiful flowers. They say he has the finest greenhouses and the most beautiful conservatory in this part of England—some say, in all England."

As they entered the conservatory, Bertha turned towards Jack and remarked: "I am sorry I cannot agree with you, Mr. De Vinne, but I wish very much that the sun was shining. Flowers never look so beauti-

ful as when the sun falls upon them. They are always beautiful, but the sunlight makes them more so."

They were alone and Jack grew venturesome.

"There is something else that the sun has the same effect upon," he remarked.

"Why, what can that be?"

"A pretty girl," answered Jack, with a laugh. "Especially if she has"—he hesitated, but decided to finish his speech—"especially if she has golden hair."

Bertha avoided the compliment. "I have heard that it is still more effective when it falls upon a certain shade of red."

"That may be so," said Jack, "but my acquaintance is rather limited and I must confess I never knew a young lady with red hair."

They walked about, Bertha extolling the beauty of the flowers and calling many of them by name.

"I do not think you love flowers as I do, Mr. De Vinne."

"I will be honest, Miss Renville, I prefer fish. Now, could I induce you to come with me on the river this morning?"

"I am no great lover of Father Thames," she replied. "I have been in his embrace once and it was not very pleasant."

"They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place," remarked Jack, "and I don't think you are in any danger of falling overboard again. If you refuse I shall consider it as a personal reflection upon my ability as a sailor."

"Oh, Mr. De Vinne, you must not think that I meant such a thing. It is no lack of confidence in you; it is the other fellow who doesn't know how to manage a boat that I'm afraid of. I am a pretty good sailor myself, and I could have swum ashore that day had I not been encumbered with my dress. Women are at a

great disadvantage, on account of their dress, in all sports and games."

"Well," said Jack, "if you object to a voyage on the briny deep, what do you say to a land trip? I have no doubt Mr. Glynne has a turnout in his stable. Do you know I am a great admirer of the poet Gray? You know he is buried at Stoke Pogis, not very far from here. I should be delighted to go there, and it will add greatly to my pleasure if you will accompany me."

Bertha smiled archly. "I have heard that sailors make very poor landsmen and know very little about horses."

"Oh, now, you're joking me, Miss Renville." A cloud passed over his face and his voice grew grave.

"Pardon me, Mr. De Vinne, I have to supply the fun for the family. Perhaps my familiarity with those whom I meet every day has led me to be wanting in the respect due to a stranger."

"How can you call me a stranger?" cried Jack.

"Well, now," cried Bertha, "I see that I am making a mess of it. So we had better stop just where we are. You have asked me to go to drive with you. I accept your invitation with pleasure."

When they arrived at Stoke Pogis, Jack tied the horse to a convenient hitching-post and they went into the secluded churchyard.

As they stood by the tomb of the poet's mother, Jack read aloud the inscription upon it.

"He must have loved his mother devotedly," said Bertha.

"All really good men love their mothers," said Jack. "To me my mother is the dearest creature in the world." Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had made two unfortunate admissions. By implication he had given his hearer to understand that he was a really good man, and in the second case he had told

her that he loved his mother better than any person else. "What a blundering fool I have been," he said to himself. "The old Greek was right when he wrote that silence is the greatest of all virtues."

He had been very brave while sitting in Victor's room, when he had declared his fixed purpose to propose to Miss Renville at sight, but as he gazed into her beautiful face his courage left him.

Miss Renville, fortunately, changed the subject. "My mother died when I was very young, and I was but six years old when I lost my father, but Guardy has been very good to me. If my parents had lived longer, I should have felt their loss much more than I have. Is your father living, Mr. De Vinne?"

"Oh, yes," said Jack. "He is hale and hearty. They used to say that there was no stronger, sturdier man in the House of Lords."

"What?" cried Bertha, with astonishment. "Is your father a peer?"

"Why, didn't you know?" asked Jack. "I imagined Clarence must have told you. My father is the Earl of Noxtton. My home is at Noxtton Hall in Surrey."

Bertha turned her face away.

"Why, Miss Renville, are you sorry that I am the son of an earl? It does not amount to much in my case, for I am only a second son. My brother Carolus is the heir to the title and estates. You know there is nothing for second sons to do in England but to go into the Army or Navy or to enter the Church. I expect to be ordered on a cruise very shortly."

"I should not like that," said Bertha. "If I were a young man, I should look forward to a happy home life."

"So do I, one of these days," said Jack. "There may be a war and I may come home covered with glory, and perhaps Parliament will give me a pension."

Then he reflected that he had made another blunder. How could he ask the beautiful being who stood beside him to become his wife when he, of his own accord, had said that such happiness could only come to him in the, perhaps, far distant future. A thought came to him suddenly that sent a cold chill through his frame. How near he had come to trespassing on his friend's hospitality. What right had he to ask Miss Renville to become his wife until he had spoken to her guardian on the subject? No, he must drop the whole matter just where it was until he had obtained an interview with Mr. Glynne, Sr.

The opportunity came to him that evening, for his host invited him into the library to inspect the fine editions of rare books with which the shelves were filled.

While examining the flowers in the conservatory, Jack had kept his eyes fixed, most of the time, upon Miss Renville, but in the library he devoted his attention to the fine bindings and beautiful illustrations rather than to his companion.

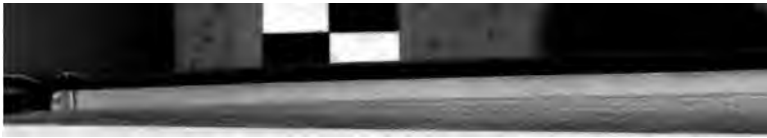
"I suppose you smoke," said Mr. Glynne. "I do not, and I have made it an inflexible rule not to allow smoking in this room, but when you join my son Clarence in the billiard room, you will have all the opportunity you desire to indulge in your love of tobacco."

"All the boys at the Academy smoked," said Jack, "and I fell into it with the rest of them."

"The late Mrs. Glynne abhorred smoking," said his host, "and I felt that I should be untrue to her memory if I should take up the habit now. Clarence has the most reprehensible habit of smoking cigarettes. I am not so averse to the odour of good tobacco, but I think the odour of burnt paper is positively vile."

"I agree with you," said Jack. "When I smoke I fill my pipe and make a business of it."

"Well, my advice to you, Mr. De Vinne, is to give



up the habit before it becomes too firmly fixed upon you. You will be getting married one of these days. Perhaps your wife may not object openly to your smoking, but secretly she will wish you did not."

Jack felt that Mr. Glynne had broken the ice for him. "If I can get the girl I wish for my wife," he said, "I will throw my pipe into the river and the tobacco after it."

There was a broad smile upon Mr. Glynne's face. "Then you have not asked her?"

"Oh, no," said Jack, "there was a preliminary step that must come first."

"And when will that be taken?"

"I think now is a good time," said Jack, in a non-chalant way. "The fact is, Mr. Glynne, I have fallen deeply in love with your ward, Miss Renville."

Mr. Glynne recoiled and would have measured his length on the floor if Jack had not sprung forward and prevented.

"I must have caught my boot-heel in the rug," said Mr. Glynne, as he recovered his physical equilibrium; his mental equilibrium, though, was greatly out of joint. "Mr. De Vinne," he began, "I am really surprised at what you say. Take it altogether, you have not known the young lady more than forty-eight hours. Of course, under the circumstances of your first meeting, it is but natural that you should feel an interest in her, for she is really a very beautiful girl."

"She is an angel," ejaculated Jack, fervently.

"You have done very wisely, Mr. De Vinne, in speaking to me about this before revealing the state of your feelings to Miss Renville, and I would advise you not to mention the subject to her until after you have spoken to your father, the Earl. You should know the truth of the matter. Miss Renville is beautiful, but she is poor; in fact, she is a dependent upon my bounty. I do not grudge it to her, for her father and I were the

best of friends, and on his death-bed I promised him that I would treat her as though she were my own daughter."

"That was noble of you," cried Jack, and before Mr. Glynne could object the young man grasped his hand and shook it warmly.

"I do not ask any praise for my action," said Mr. Glynne. "Bertha is the light of our household, and I shall miss her greatly when the time comes, if it ever does, for her to go from us. I will tell you a little secret, but you must not mention it to my son. I had hoped in my heart that Clarence and Bertha would fall in love with each other and in that way I should be in no danger of losing her; but some young men are as fickle as women, and my son does not seem to know his own heart." He was going to say "what is best for him," but changed the form of the remark just in time.

"I do not blame you for not wishing to lose her," said Jack.

"I think Clarence must be waiting for you in the billiard room," suggested Mr. Glynne, "but before you go, Mr. De Vinne—as I stand in the relation of a father to Miss Renville—I wish you would give me your promise not to make any direct proposal to my ward until you have talked the matter over with your father."

When Jack joined Clarence in the billiard room, the latter exclaimed: "Where have you been, old boy?"

"I have been having a talk with your father."

"Oh, yes," said Clarence. "He has been showing you the beautiful pictures in his library, I suppose. Well, he hung on to you longer than he could have hung on to me."

"Mr. Glynne," said Jack, "I have known you but a short time, but I want to ask you a question."

"Go ahead, old fellow. If I can't answer it, I'll keep still."

"It is a serious matter," said Jack. "You may



think the inquiry is an impertinent one and refuse to answer for that reason."

"Well," said Clarence, "as you stand about four inches taller than I do, and weigh about forty pounds more, I don't think I shall resort to personal violence even if my feelings are injured."

"Well," said Jack, "I think we understand each other, so I will ask you the question in the bluntest possible way. Are you in love with Miss Renville, or are you likely to be, and is it probable that you will ever ask her to become your wife?"

"Well," said Clarence, with a laugh, "that's not one question, that's three, but fortunately I can answer all with one little word—No. Now, Mr. De Vinne, will you allow me to ask you a question?"

"Why, certainly," said Jack, whose face showed that Clarence's reply to his question had greatly pleased him.

"Well," began Clarence, "Mr. Jack De Vinne, I would like to ask you if you are in love with Miss Renville, or if not, are you likely to be, and is there any probability of your ever asking her to become your wife?"

"Fortunately," said Jack, "I can answer you with a monosyllable—Yes."

Clarence extended his hand. "Shake, old boy! Go ahead and win."

"I have been talking to your father," said Jack, "and although what he told me does not lessen my love for Miss Renville in any way, it must postpone our happiness. He says his ward is very poor."

Involuntarily, Clarence gave a loud whistle.

Jack looked astonished. "What did you do that for?" he asked.

"Oh," said Clarence, "when the governor talks to me about his generosity I always whistle."

"Pardon me, Mr. Glynne," said Jack, "but cannot you add a word or two to the whistle?"

"Well," said Clarence, "perhaps I can put in a word. A thought that usually runs through my mind when the governor is talking to me, is, don't believe all he says. Take my advice, Mr. De Vinne, follow the course your heart dictates and I believe everything will come out right in the end. Now, I have been waiting nearly an hour for you for this little game of billiards and I must insist upon you taking your cue."

It was late that night when Clarence parted from Jack at the door of the latter's room. Young Mr. Glynne had smoked cigarettes incessantly while they had been playing billiards, and he felt the necessity of a walk in the open air before going to bed.

As he passed the door of the library, he was surprised to find it open, for he had supposed that his father had already retired.

"Is that you, Clarence?"

"Yes, father. I thought you had gone to bed."

"Come in," said the elder Mr. Glynne. "I want to talk to you."

Clarence sauntered into the room, his hands in his pockets, wondering what was in store for him. His father shut the door and then turned upon him sharply.

"Clarence, what an infernal fool you were to bring that fellow down here."

"On the contrary," said Clarence, "I think it was a very gentlemanly and courteous act, under the circumstances. He saved Bertha's life, and I think it was due to him to give him an opportunity to see her."

"Oh, yes," snarled his father, "it is all right for him to come and see her, but she is a silly girl. She knows how to swim and she could have gotten ashore all right that day, but she thinks she owes her life to him and, no doubt, if he asked her to marry him, she would be agreeable; not because she loved him, but out of gratitude."

"Well," said Clarence, "I may be the infernal fool you say I am, but I do not think Bertha is so bereft of sense that she would marry any man out of simple gratitude. If she loves Jack De Vinne, she will marry him because she loves him and not for any other reason."

"Well," said his father, "she shan't marry him, and you know the reason. I shall count upon you to help me; besides, it is for your interest to do so. You remember I told you that, if she does not marry you, she shall not marry any one else. If she tries to, I shall find a way to stop it."

"Is that all you've got to say?" asked Clarence. "This conversation is very disagreeable to me; in fact, I can't see the point to it. If Mr. De Vinne had asked Bertha to marry him and she had consented, there would be an exigency for us both to face but, under the circumstances, I see no reason why either you or I should be deprived of our night's rest. I'm going out for a little walk in the park. I will tell Brinkley to wait up for me until I get back. Good-night, father, and pleasant dreams."

When Monday morning came and Jack's visit was at an end, he had no inclination to return to London. Victor had gone to join his ship. Clarence was going to the city to attend to business, and Jack, naturally, accompanied him.

Mr. Glynne, Sr., invited him to come again, but there was no great warmth in the invitation.

Jack had hoped that he would be able to speak a few words to Bertha in private, but Mr. Glynne was omnipresent, and beyond a shake of the hand and a parting glance—friendly in its nature but nothing more—Jack's romance came to an end, for the time, at least.

When he reached London he determined to go at once to Noxtton Hall. Mr. Glynne had advised him to talk

the matter over with his father and he had decided to do so.

When he reached home the dogs and the stable-boys ran out to greet him.

His father extended the fingers of a cold, clammy hand and remarked: "Glad to see you, Jack, of course. Greatly pleased that you have passed. Had hoped that it would have been with a higher standing, but I presume there were many young men of exceptional ability in your class."

"Yes, there were," said Jack, "and I did not belong to that class."

The Earl sniffed. "You have had every advantage of heredity and every opportunity for preparation. I do not see any reason why you should not have ranked with the highest. Being in the Navy is the same as being in public life, and when I was in public life I always kept my eyes upon the topmost round of the ladder."

"Yes," said Jack, "and I am very proud of the fact that you finally put your foot upon it."

The Earl acknowledged the compliment with a stiff bow. "I believe," he said, "in the transmission of ability from one generation to another. I am proud to say that my ancestors were men of eminence. I cannot help feeling some regret that one of my descendants——"

Jack broke in: "But you have Carolus. All the virtues and ability of our ancestors must descend to him. I am only a second son, and it makes little difference what becomes of me."

"That is not the right way to look at it," said the Earl, severely. "To be sure, Carolus is heir-apparent, but in the midst of life we are in death. You know Carolus is not in good health. If anything should happen to him you become the heir, and you should be as well-fitted for the position as is my elder son."



"Well, I'm sorry I'm not," said Jack. "I think I could keep the stables up to a high standard, but as regards the rest of the estate, I'm afraid I should have to depend on the steward."

"I am glad you have come as you have," said the Earl, changing the subject. "Your mother received a letter this morning from the Countess of Ashmont. She's in Paris now with her daughter, Lady Angeline, who, you know, is betrothed to your brother Carolus. They expected that Carolus would return from the baths in Germany in time to escort them back to London, but as he cannot do so, the Countess has written to know if I could possibly spare time from my estates and official duties. I really cannot do so, but I am fortunate in having a son who can perform that pleasant duty for me and for his brother. You know, in case anything should happen to Carolus, which Heaven forbid, I should expect you to——"

"To marry Lady Angeline?" asked Jack. "I really could not do that. To tell you the truth, father, since I left the Academy I have had a most surprising adventure. I rescued a beautiful young girl from drowning and have fallen in love with her."

"Who is she?" asked the Earl.

"She is an orphan," said Jack. "She is the ward of Mr. Thomas Glynn, of Buckholme, in Berkshire."

"I never heard of him. What is he?"

"He is the senior member of the firm of Walmonth and Company in London. They are in the iron and steel business, I believe. They sell a good deal to the Admiralty."

"Has she money in her own right?"

Jack was honest; in fact, too honest for his own good. It is not always advisable to tell all the truth upon the slightest provocation.

"Her guardian says she is poor—in fact, entirely dependent upon his bounty."

"Then," said the Earl, "I think the sooner you go to Paris the better. After you return with the Countess and her daughter, we are all going to Scotland. Carolus will be back by that time, and I think the northern air will do him good."

"But you say nothing about the young lady with whom I am in love," persisted Jack.

"I do not see that there is anything to be said," rejoined the Earl. "You have told me that the young lady is penniless; for the second son of an earl to take a penniless bride is more than foolish—it would be a crime."

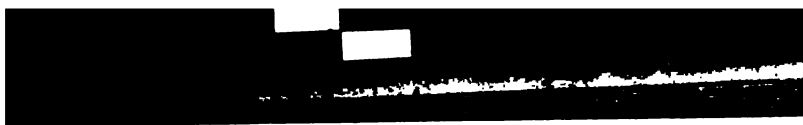
Jack went up to his mother's room. His path of love was not strewn with rose-leaves and no sunlight fell upon it. Both guardian and father were against him. Perhaps he had been building a castle in the air, for she, too, might refuse him after all. His brother Carolus was his father's pride, but his mother had always seemed to love him more than her elder son.

Jack felt that he must confide in her, and took the first opportunity, after family affairs had been talked over, to tell of his adventure and of the beautiful girl who had won his love.

His mother proved sympathetic. "I do not see why your father should speak as he did. I was a penniless girl, too, when he made me his bride. We have been very happy together and he has never reproached me for my lack of a fortune. Take courage, Jack; follow the course that the young man whom you call Clarence advised you to take. As he said, all may come out well in the end."

"But father says that if Carolus should die, he would expect me to marry Lady Angeline."

"He has no right to expect any such thing," said his mother. "He has no right to move you about as though you were a pawn on a chess-board, and I have too high an opinion of Lady Angeline to think that she would so soon forget your brother Carolus, to whom she



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is most devoted. It is possible that in time she might learn to love you, but if you did not love her, why,—” and the Countess laughed,—“there is nothing more to it, Jack, than there is to the light of the firefly. It beckons us on, but it cannot be relied upon to lead us to our destination.”

“I have only one ray of hope,” said Jack. “Mr. Glynn’s son made a very strange remark, and, I nearly forgot, he gave a whistle before he spoke.”

“And what did he say?” asked his mother.

“He told me not to believe all his father said.”

“Ah!” said Lady De Vinne. “Perhaps there is a mystery there. I had a box of books come down from Mudie’s a few days ago, and I have been reading a novel in which a beautiful young girl, being left an orphan, was committed to the charge of her father’s most intimate friend. She was the rightful owner of a large fortune, but her guardian concealed that fact from her and told everybody that she was penniless. I have not finished the story yet, but I have no doubt that in the end the guardian’s duplicity will be shown and that she will regain her fortune and marry the young man whom she loves.”

“Why,” cried Jack, “that fits the case exactly.”

“Well, then,” said his mother, “do not lose hope,” and putting her arms about his neck she drew him towards her and kissed him. “You know, Jack, you have always been very dear to me and I wish you to be happy. Whenever you need advice or consolation, always come to your mother.”

“I will,” said Jack.

He went downstairs feeling much happier than he had after his interview with his father.

He made his preparations to go to Paris, for he saw that nothing was to be gained by refusing to comply with his father’s request. He was to leave for London the next afternoon.

Soon after breakfast he went to the stables. Joe Grimm, his favorite stable-boy, had saddled his horse.

"I am going to take a little gallop," he said, as he threw a shilling to the youngster.

He came back in about an hour, looking much refreshed, with his head clear, his mind light, and a great hope, restored by his mother's words, in his heart. As he dismounted, he saw Hodson coming towards him in great haste.

"Your father wants you at once in the library."

"What's the matter?" cried Jack. "Is he ill?"

"No," said Hodson, "but something terrible has happened. I don't know what it is. He is crying. Your mother is with him, and she is crying, too."

As Jack entered the room he saw that what Hodson had told him was true. He did not know what to say, and stood expectantly waiting for his father or mother to speak.

His father arose and came towards him. Placing his hand on Jack's shoulder, he said: "What I feared has come to pass. Your brother Carolus is dead, and you are the heir to the Earldom of Noxton and its estates. I hope, my son, that you will prove worthy of them both."

CHAPTER VI.

DUAL LIVES.

“Do you see that ‘that’?”

The speaker was Mr. B. Gorham Potts, head reader for the great London publishing firm of Johnson, Johnson, Smythe & Johnson, and as he uttered the words he laid a page-proof upon the table before the young lady who sat busily engaged in writing.

Mr. Potts had been christened Benjamin Gorham, the Benjamin being in honour of a maternal uncle who had gone to South Africa, and, rumour said, had accumulated a large fortune. But when the said uncle died and no news came of an inheritance for any members of the Potts family, both father and mother agreed that a mistake had been made at the baptismal font. No change, however, had been made in young Benjamin's name. He began work in a printing-office at the early age of fourteen and for a period of sixteen years had been called “Ben” by every one in the establishment, from the senior proprietor to the smallest errand boy.

When at the age of thirty he secured a position in the publishing house, in the composition of which there were so many Johnsons that he decided a change must and should be made.

“Maria,” he said to his wife, “I am going to work for a very large corporation. I am to hold a dignified position and for that reason I think I should bear a dignified name.”

“Yes, Benny,” said his wife, in a tone full of affection.

"That is the last time you will use that name, Maria," he exclaimed.

The diminutive little woman was startled by his language and the sharp tone in which the words were uttered. She said nothing, but acted as though she had received a blow.

"Yes, Maria, I have decided to change my name. My old skin-flint of an Uncle Benjamin, for whom I was named, left me nothing. I have honoured his memory for thirty years, but in future I propose to be known as B. Gorham Potts and to sign my name in that way."

The little woman took in the situation. "Yes, Gorham," she exclaimed, timidly.

"Don't you think that's an improvement?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" and then with that delightful British unconsciousness of her own joke, she exclaimed: "Let it be Gorham."

But to return to that "that."

Mr. Potts repeated his question in a more decisive manner. "Do you see that 'that'?"

The young lady addressed tossed her head and pouted perceptibly. She was a pretty little brunette. Proof-readers are made responsible for so many errors perpetrated by others, as well as for their own shortcomings, that they are inclined to tergiversation when matters are brought to them for correction. She shut one eye and looked closely at the offending word with the other.

At last she said: "There is one 'that,' but I am unable to see the second 'that' to which you refer."

Mr. Potts was thin and angular. He smiled occasionally; not all at once—it might be said in sections—the smile moving from one feature to another, like sunlight on a picket fence. Mr. Potts was not a hard-hearted man and as he looked at the dainty little woman before him, the thought came to him: "What if she were

my daughter and some other man stood in my place, under similar circumstances?"

"Do you not see, Miss Caswell, that that 'that' should be a 'than' instead of that 'that'?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "it ought to be 'than,'" and she turned over quickly some galley-slips which lay beside her.

"Well," she said, "the author did not see it."

"I should think, Miss Caswell, that you had been a proof-reader long enough to have learned that an author never sees anything," said Mr. Potts, contemptuously. "They are too busy with ideas to think of such minor matters as spelling, punctuation, and grammar."

"That's true of Mr. Stowell," said Miss Caswell, "and such writing, too, but his books sell."

"We have made him," said Mr. Potts, his chest swelling. "He was an unknown author, but we made his first book go."

"And he has been a go ever since," said Miss Caswell, laughing.

"Yes, and when Mr. Smythe rejected one of his books he took it to another house and they are getting the benefit of all our advertising."

"Well, you could not expect him to throw his manuscript into the ash-heap," remarked Miss Caswell.

"No, but he could have threatened to do it and Smythe would have taken it, but authors have no tact—they are all temper—they think publishers are their enemies instead of being their best friends."

Miss Caswell enjoyed the conversation; it gave her a little rest from her very prosaic duties. She was well acquainted with the peculiarities of Mr. Potts and knew how to extend the conversation indefinitely.

"How about the critics?" she asked.

"Bah!" exclaimed Mr. Potts. "They are just as bad; each one likes a certain kind of story and he calls the rest rubbish."

Miss Caswell, evidently, had a feeling for the critic. "It must be wearing to read so many books; no wonder they praise what they like."

"I don't believe they read them. They get an idea of the plot from some other paper; then they open the book, read a few pages here and there, and then write their review. Why, I know a critic who flouted a book because there were two 'buts' in the same sentence, but the joke was, both were used correctly. We had three Oxford professors decide the question."

Miss Caswell dexterously gave another turn to the conversation: "You must get tired of reading so many stories, Mr. Potts, and in manuscript, too."

"It's a business with me; a day's work is a day's work. When it is over I have my home, my wife, my little boy Jimmy, and baby Dorcas. You ought to get married, Miss Caswell. It's the only way to live."

The young girl's face flushed. The conversation had taken an unexpected turn. It was time to get back to business.

"I am sorry I did not see that 'that,' Mr. Potts."

Again that thin, erratic smile on Mr. Potts' face. "You did see 'that,' Miss Caswell; please change it to 'than.' Had it gone to print it would have been bad, but, as we've caught it, there's no harm done. There was never a book printed that did not have some sort of an error in it. Mr. Smythe, a few years ago, read the proofs of one himself. He boasted that it was perfect and that he would give a hundred pounds to any one who found an error in it. It turned out to be such a good joke on himself that he told it, but I don't believe anybody got the hundred pounds."

"Did he find the mistake himself?" Miss Caswell asked.

"Yes, he went into a book-shop, took up the book, and was going to tell the proprietor that he would give him a hundred pounds if he could find an error in it,

when his eye lit on a colon that ought to have been a comma. He did not brag so much after that and has never read the proofs of another book since."

Mr. Potts walked away and Miss Caswell resumed her work. She had before her a large pile of proofs that must be in the printer's hands early the next morning, and it was nearly an hour beyond the appointed time for leaving when she arose from her table and made her way homeward.

"Why, where in the world have you been, Mrs. Glynne?" exclaimed Mrs. Liloquist, the landlady, as she opened the door to admit "Miss Caswell."

"Has my husband got home?"

"Oh, yes, he has been here nearly an hour and has been downstairs at least six times to ask where you were. Now, how could he expect me to know where you were?"

"It was very unreasonable in him," said Mrs. Glynne, laughing, "but, you know, men are all unreasonable."

"What's the matter, Clarence?" she cried, as she burst into the room.

Her husband, Mr. Clarence Glynne, was sitting by the window, but arose quickly and greeted his wife with an embrace and a kiss.

"Why are you here, Clarence? Of course I am delighted to see you, but you told me this morning that you would have to go to Buckholme to-night."

"I did intend to, Jennie, but really, I did not dare to go out there until I knew what to do. I was going to tell you about it this morning, but there was no time; besides, I thought I might see my way clear as to what to do, during the day."

"Do not keep me waiting any longer, Clarence," said his wife, with a little stamp of her foot. "I am just dying to know what it is about, and you keep talking all around it without telling me what the trouble is."

"Hadn't we better have supper first?"

"No," cried Jennie. "I cannot wait another minute."

"Well, the fact is," began Clarence, "you know all about Bertha; how the governor keeps asking me to propose to her. Of course he does not know that I already have a nice little wife of my own, and for that reason I excuse him."

"Well, I do not," said Jennie. "He has no business to tell you to marry anybody. But your father will have to know about our marriage some time. Mrs. Liloquist is very inquisitive, but she has not learned anything from me, except that we are very poor and we both have to work for a living. We are living dual lives, Clarence. How long shall we have to do so?"

"I cannot answer that question now," said Clarence, "but what I am going to tell you is this: Bertha has had a letter from a friend in Paris—a lady who knew her father when he lived there. She has found out in some way about Bertha and wishes her to come and pay her a visit."

"Well, I don't see anything serious in that," said Jennie. "When is she going?"

"The governor won't let her go. It's all my fault, too. I had a letter from Jack De Vinne saying that his brother was dead and that he was going to Paris to escort Lady Ashmont and her daughter home so they could go to the funeral. The big idiot that I was, I told the governor and he scented danger right off. You know I told you about Jack coming to see us. Well, he was going to propose to Bertha, but thought it was his duty to speak to his father first. Jack was only the second son of an earl then, and father frightened him a little by telling him that Bertha was a penniless orphan."

"But isn't she?" asked Jennie. "You have always said she was."



"A man and his wife are one, are they not?" asked Clarence.

"Why, you goose, of course they are."

"Well, then, Jennie, if I come into possession of a secret, no matter how, and I give my solemn promise that I will not tell, am I breaking that promise if I tell my wife?"

"Why, of course not, Clarence. You have no right to have any secrets from your wife. How can a man love, honour, and obey his wife if he keeps a secret all to himself? Now, Clarence, dear, what is the secret?"

"I will whisper it to you, Jennie. Bertha isn't poor at all; she is worth forty thousand pounds in her own right, but my father is her guardian and, according to her father's will, the governor has a right to hold on to the property until she marries, and, of course, he does not want her to marry any one—except me. Of course, I don't want her, for good and sufficient reasons which are now before me."

"Oh, I see," cried Jennie. "Jack De Vinne is going to Paris, and your father thinks that this letter business is only a scheme to enable Bertha to go to Paris and meet Jack."

"You have hit it exactly, Jennie. What heads you women have!"

"Does Bertha know Jack is there?"

"Of course she doesn't. She wants to go because she is tired of Buckholme. She has been cooped up there all her life. Now she wants to see the rest of the world."

"If she does meet Jack, it will come out all right, won't it, Clarence? Now that he is to be Earl of Noxton one of these days, with fine estates and a big rent-roll, it won't frighten him if Bertha is poor."

"Not a bit," said Clarence. "But here's the fix I'm in. Bertha never goes to father, but confides all her troubles to me. She expects me to manage it in some

way so that she can go. I told her I would, and I don't dare go to Buckholme until I can."

"Then it's lucky for you, Clarence, that you have a wife with a head, as you expressed it. If you will let me manage the affair, it will come out all right."

"You can do just as you like, Jennie. How much money will you want?"

"Oh, not a great deal. Let me see. In the first place she will wish to take her wardrobe with her. Now, it won't do for her to pack up her things at Buckholme. Mrs. Liloquist was moaning to-day because she has a vacant room next to ours. These lodging-house keepers are always in a fret and worry. Now, I will make her happy by telling her that a cousin of yours is coming to London from the country and wants a room for a week at least. Now you will have to play your part, Clarence. You must go out to Buckholme every night and be very attentive to Bertha. I won't be jealous. Every morning when you come in fetch in some of Bertha's wardrobe. I will do her packing for her, and when the important day arrives she must tell your father that she is coming to London to do some shopping and you must offer her your services to escort her."

"Well, I never heard anything like it," cried Clarence. "You ought to be a detective in Scotland Yard."

"Well, if you had read as many detective stories as I have, you would not think I have told you much of a plot after all; however, who knows but that it may turn out to be a big one in the end?"

"Well," said Clarence, "after her luggage is packed and she is here, what are you going to do next?"

"Why, I am going to Paris with her. I have never done anything in my life that will please me so much as to outwit your father."

"He is a pretty shrewd one," remarked Clarence.

"I know he is," said Jennie, "and for that reason

I am going to do something that will throw him off the track. Of course he will think that she has gone to Dover and from there to Calais and then to Paris, but we shall do nothing of the kind."

"What are you going to do?" asked her husband.

"Well, I shan't tell you until the very day we start. It is better that you should not know. You are one of those men who when they have anything on their mind everybody can see it and it makes them inquisitive. Now you had better be fancy-free until the morning of our departure; then I will tell you where we are going. Now, Clarence, I want you to make me a promise. No matter what happens, you must keep your mouth shut tight. Do not tell anybody which way we went nor where we have gone."

"You're a darling, Jennie," he cried. "I will promise anything. Now we must go out and get our suppers, for I'm as hungry as a bear."

CHAPTER VII.

BERTHA'S ESCAPE.

As Jennie anticipated, Mr. Thomas Glynne was very much pleased when he saw the growing intimacy between his son and ward.

"It isn't so hard, Clarence, to come out from London every night and go back every morning as it used to be, is it?"

Clarence, with his usual lack of tact, put his foot in it again. "Well, governor, forty thousand pounds is not to be sneezed at."

"You're right, Clarence, and I'm glad to see that you are growing sensible. I have often wondered how you could be so foolish on a certain point and yet be a son of mine."

Clarence had to tell Bertha his secret—that he was married and that it was his inventive little wife who had thought out a plan by which her escape from Fencholme could be managed successfully.

"Oh, I shall be so pleased to meet her," said Bertha. "You say she is a little woman."

"Oh, yes," said Clarence, with enthusiasm. "I can take her right in my arms and carry her about. I don't think she weighs more than eight stone and perhaps not so much. But she wants to know what part of Paris your friend lives in. She has been there and knows the city pretty well."

"I will let her have my new friend's letter," said Bertha. "It will be safer with her anyway. Here it is," and she took it from her bosom. "You may read it."

Clarence availed himself of her permission.

"MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL:

"I have just learned in a roundabout way, which I shall not take time to explain here, that the only child of one who was a very dear friend of mine years ago, Mr. Oscar Renville, is living in England and is a ward of Mr. Thomas Glynne, of Buckholme, in Berkshire. I do not remember your christian name and for that reason have directed this letter simply to Miss Renville. I remember you when you were a little girl; that is why I began this letter as I have. When your father used to bring you to see me, he called you by some pet name which might or might not have been your own, but which, as I said before, I have forgotten. I have not forgotten you, however. I am a widow with one son, nearly twenty-two. I was married when quite young and am not yet forty; so you see I am not yet an old woman and shall not be such bad company, after all, for a young girl of eighteen. I shall be delighted to have you come to Paris and stay with me as long as your guardian will allow. On the outside it is a beautiful city; under the crust there is a great deal of wickedness, but we shall keep away from that and look for the goodness which I know, too, is here. Give my kindest regards to Mr. Glynne, and tell him that I shall be pleased to have him as my guest, for I presume he will accompany you to Paris. I live at Number 22, Rue St. Francis. Every cab-driver in Paris knows where it is and there are many people in this city who know your loving friend,

"MARIE, Countess Mont d'Oro."

The transportation of Bertha's wardrobe from Buckholme to Clarence's lodgings was carried on without causing any suspicion in the mind of the elder Mr. Glynne and a day was fixed for her departure.

Jennie suggested that Mr. De Vinne should know that Bertha was going to Paris.

"He may be there now," said her husband. "I have seen no notice in the paper of his brother's funeral. I will send him a wire; that's the best way."

Clarence's message was short and to the point; it contained but five words: "Are you there? Something important."

The return message was equally concise. "Funeral day after to-morrow. Write me."

"Quite a coincidence" said Jennie. "Mr. De Vinne's brother is to be buried on the day we have fixed for our departure. I do not think it is best for him to meet Bertha while she is with us. She had to know our secret, but it is not necessary that any more should be acquainted with it just at present. You write to him to-day that we are going, and he will probably lose no time in taking the most direct course by way of Dover and Calais."

"Yes," said Clarence, "but how are you going?"

"We shall leave London day after to-morrow by a very early train. I've got it all figured out. Bertha is coming to the city to-morrow. Of course your father will fume and fret and wonder why you two do not return home, but knowing that she is with you will relieve his anxiety to a great extent."

"If he thought I had eloped with her, he would be perfectly satisfied," said Clarence.

"No doubt, but will he be so well satisfied when he learns that she has eloped with your wife? But you must not tell him. Give me your solemn promise that you will not. To-morrow night I will tell you the route which I have laid out for our flight."

Clarence's conversation with his wife had taken place in the afternoon and he returned to Buckholme that evening. He was more attentive than ever to Bertha. The senior Mr. Glynne sought the seclusion of his li-

brary. With his hands clasped behind him, he walked briskly up and down the long apartment, smiling to himself and repeating in an undertone: "That boy of mine is no fool after all; he knows on which side his bread is buttered."

The next morning Clarence said: "Governor, things are moving along faster than I expected. I have not proposed yet. I think it is best not to hurry the matter; but I would like to have Bertha go to London with me, as I saw a beautiful locket in a jeweller's window in Regent Street. I am going to take her to look at it and if she is delighted with it, as I know she will be, I am going to buy it for her. You know there is nothing pleases a woman as much as——" He came near saying "having her own way," but he bethought himself in time and finished with, "having a nice present from a young man."

The senior Mr. Glynne rubbed his hands together gleefully, and patted his son approvingly on the shoulder. His next move was to take out his pocket-book, from which he extracted a ten-pound note which he passed to Clarence, saying: "Get something pretty nice."

The evening of that day found Bertha an occupant of the room which had remained so long empty in Mrs. Liloquist's lodging-house. She had been introduced as Miss Mary Barker, a cousin of Mr. Glynne's, who was on the way to see her brother who lived in Berwick-on-Tweed, near the Scottish border.

"It's a long journey," said Mrs. Glynne, "and I am going with her. I told Mr. Potts—he is the head man at the place where I work—that I was about tired out and needed a little vacation. So you see, as the old proverb says, I am going to kill two birds with one stone."

Mrs. Liloquist always subdued her curiosity if she was confided in. It was the safest way to deal with her,

for if subjected to a severe cross-examination, which was quite possible, she might tell more than was wished, or than was desirable under the circumstances.

When Jennie and her husband were alone in their own room, Jennie remarked: "I think I have satisfied Mrs. Liloquist. I don't think she will ask you any questions."

"But you have not satisfied my curiosity," said Clarence. "Now is the accepted time; where are you going—I mean, which way are you going to Paris?"

"Well, sit down," said Jennie, "and I will tell you the whole story. It is quite a romance. I was born, as you know, in the little coast town of Pagham in Sussex. The people make their living by fishing, and my father was a fisherman. You know, both my father and mother are dead. If I had not been left an orphan, I should not have come to London. I am glad I did so, for if I had not I should never have met you; but that's not the point. I have been down to Pagham. There are a good many living there now who knew my father. One of his best friends was Captain Jacob Carder, who now owns one of the best fishing vessels in the town. Now, perhaps, you guess my plan.

"Instead of taking Bertha to Paris by way of Dover and Calais, we shall go down to Pagham and Captain Carder will take us over to France in his schooner. He says he will land us at a place where it will be easy for us to get a train for Paris. Your father, of course, will ask you where Bertha is. You must say you don't know. In such cases, white lies are allowable. I cannot tell you what to say to your father, because, if I do, I know you will get it all mixed up. Whatever you say you must invent on the spur of the moment and then stick to it."

By half-past six the next morning Mrs. Glynne and Bertha were on their way to Pagham. Clarence did not accompany them to the station.

"You had better not," said Jennie. "Your father will put detectives on your track, and one of them will be sure to be at the station and recognise you. I am not so well known and for that reason will be able to escape observation. I shouldn't wonder if your father came to London by the first train from Buckholme."

Clarence arrived at his office an hour earlier than usual. His wife's surmise had been correct—his father was there before him.

"Are you married, Clarence?" was the first question.

"Why, no," said the son, taken aback by the question.

"Well, then, where's Bertha? What do you mean by bringing her to the city in such a manner? Where is she, I say?"

The crucial moment had come. Clarence had thought of a dozen different explanations to give, but the one he did offer was, as his wife had advised, the inspiration of the moment.

"I could not help it," he said. "It was all over in a minute. It must have been prearranged between them."

"Who are you talking about?" his father thundered.

"Why, Jack De Vinne and Bertha," said Clarence. "We drove down to Regent Street in a four-wheeler. She was delighted with the locket and I bought it for her. I took your ten pounds for the chain. As we came out of the store, who should I see standing on the sidewalk but Jack De Vinne. Bertha got into the carriage and I was on the point of following her, when she exclaimed that she had left her parasol on the showcase. I went back for it, but when I came out of the store the carriage was gone."

"What an infernal fool you were, Clarence."

"Why, governor, how could I help it? I had no idea that Jack De Vinne was in London. I should

have as soon expected to see the man in the moon. I supposed that he was at Noxton Hall. I understood his brother was to be buried yesterday. The paper said so."

Mr. Glynne, Sr., seemed staggered by the information. "You never do anything, Clarence, that you don't make a mess of it. When you get married I have no doubt you will make a mistake and get the wrong woman."

"I may be a big fool, as you say, but I don't think I shall make that mistake."

"Where do you think they have gone?" asked Mr. Glynne.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Clarence.

"Well, I have," said his father.

"Where?" asked Clarence.

"I shall confide my suspicions to the detectives. I do not think you are a safe person for confidences. I think you had better stay in London, Clarence, until I go back to Buckholme. I will let you know when I do so."

"Well, that's over," said Clarence to himself after his father had left the room. "I have told more lies in the last fifteen minutes than I ever told before in all my life; but Jennie said it was all right, and she knows. I shall have to go up to the house this noon. Bertha had so many things that she could not take with her, and Jennie made me promise to pack them up and send them after her."

It was a huge package when complete and much too heavy for Clarence to carry under his arm. He discovered this fact after he had walked a short distance from his lodgings, and calling a cab, told the driver to take him to the railway parcel office.

Twenty minutes later, a round-faced, smoothly shaven man applied the knocker so vigorously that Mrs. Liloquist's face was rosy-red when she opened the door.



COUNT MONT D'ORO



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"Why, sir, you must be in a great hurry to make such a racket. Now, what do you want, sir?"

"Is there a young man living here named Glynne?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Mrs. Liloquist. "He just went out. He had a big bundle, and I told him it was too heavy for him to carry."

"How soon is he coming back?"

"Well, really, I don't know. He usually comes home about six o'clock, but his wife's gone away with a friend and perhaps he'll stay out later. Men usually do when their wives are away."

"Did you say his wife had gone away? I don't think he can be the one I want to find. I am his uncle. I have been in South Africa and have just got back to London. The young man I want to find is named Clarence Glynne."

"Well, that's his name," said Mrs. Liloquist, "and his wife's name is Jennie. They have been living here with me nearly two years."

"And you say that she has gone away with a friend?"

"Yes, a young lady named Mary Barker, who lives in Devonshire. Miss Barker's brother lives in Berwick-on-Tweed and Mrs. Glynne has gone there with her."

"What sort of a looking person is this Miss Barker?"

"Oh, she's just the beautifullest girl I ever saw. I have read in books about young ladies with blue eyes and golden hair, but she's the first one I ever saw that matched the story book."

"Well," said the gentleman, "I will come around again about six o'clock. Much obliged to you, ma'am, for your information. I hope my nephew has got a good wife."

"Oh, she's a fine woman," said Mrs. Liloquist, "and very clever. She works every day at something or other. She's the kind of a wife for a poor man, and I

judge from what your nephew says that they would have hard work getting along if she didn't do something to help."

Clarence was surprised late that afternoon to have another visit from his father. Mr. Glynne, Sr., was accompanied by a stalwart gentleman with a marked professional aspect.

"So you've got back again, father," said Clarence, not suspecting the turn which affairs had taken. "Have you found any clue?"

"Plenty of them," said his father, sternly. "I know the whole business. Come into the private office with me, and you, Mr. Lake," he said, turning to his companion, "sit down and wait for us."

When they were alone together the expression on Mr. Thomas Glynne's face changed from one of assumed serenity to one of the deepest malignity.

"Clarence Glynne," said his father, "I told you this morning that you were an infernal fool; now I know that you are an infernal liar. You have been deceiving me for years. You are a married man, and that is the reason why you have refused to marry my ward."

Clarence sank into a chair. Oh, if Jennie were only there to help him!

"I am going to make short work of this. Do you know who that man is in the other room?"

Clarence shook his head.

"He is an officer from Scotland Yard. I have lodged a complaint against you for kidnapping my ward. Although you are my son, I shall proceed against you as though you were an utter stranger."

A rat will turn when it is cornered, and Clarence felt that he must do something, or within an hour he would be behind the bars.

"Do you mean to have me arrested, father?"

"Certainly, I do, and if the case goes against

you, you won't see that wife of yours for years to come."

The words stung Clarence. Separated from Jennie! No, he could not stand that.

"Father, under the circumstances, I consider myself absolved from the promise I made you to keep silent about Bertha's property. If I am taken to court I shall tell the whole story."

"I had supposed that you would," said his father. "Your landlady said that Bertha, or Miss Barker, as she called her, had gone up North, but I know better. She is gone to Paris to meet Jack De Vinne. You can get ready to go with the officer. We will be back for you in five minutes."

Clarence did not know what to do. He had lost his hold over his father. His threat to tell the truth about Bertha's fortune had failed to produce any effect upon him.

During the five minutes which had been allowed him, Clarence did nothing but think in an aimless sort of a way of a dozen impossible courses of action.

The door of the private office opened and his father entered with Mr. Lake.

"I have decided," said his father, "not to give you into custody until to-morrow morning. I wish you to accompany me to Buckholme. Mr. Lake will go with us and keep you under surveillance."

Clarence did not wish to sit and look at the stern face of his father, nor the enigmatical one of Mr. Lake; nor did he wish to feel that their eyes were fastened upon him, reading, perhaps, his inmost thoughts. He sank into a corner of the carriage and closed his eyes, to all appearances in a state of apathetic indifference. But his mind was busy. What was his father about to do? Would he throw him out of the business? Well, if he did, he made up his mind that he could make a living some way. To be sure, he had been provided

with everything that he needed at Buckholme, but his personal share of the profits of the firm of Walmonth & Company had been very small. It was for that reason that his wife had obtained employment. As to his arrest for kidnapping, he cared but little.

Before they reached Maidenhead the tumult of his feelings had subsided, and when they entered the house the servants could not have told from his appearance that anything had happened.

His father shut himself in the library. Clarence went to the billiard room to play a game of pool solitaire, but when he found that he was closely followed by Mr. Lake, he invited him to join in the game and found him no mean antagonist. But while he played, outwardly calm, his thoughts were busy, and during the evening he asked himself a hundred times: "Have they reached Paris in safety?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SORROW AND A SOLACE.

THE next morning after breakfast, during which not a word was spoken by either of the three gentlemen, Clarence was commanded by his father to follow him into the library. He saw by the look on his parent's face that he was implacable. He would, naturally, have objected to the mandatory tone used by his father, but decided that it was useless to quarrel about trifles when there were such important matters to be settled.

Mr. Glynn, Sr., sat at the library table and Clarence sank into a chair a few feet distant.

"Turn your face around so that the light may fall upon it," said his father. "I propose to ask you a few questions and I expect you to tell me the truth. If you lie to me, I think the light will help me to ascertain that fact."

Clarence did as he was bidden.

"Now, who is your wife and what is she?"

"Is that material?" asked Clarence.

"Do not bandy words; the sooner we get at the point of the matter the better. As to its being material, I think it is; very much so."

"She is an orphan. She was the daughter of a fisherman, but when she lost her parents she came to London and went to work to support herself. She worked in our office for a while, but left because a better position was offered her."

"Very good," said his father. "You surely looked for high game and got it."

"If you make any more such comments about my

wife," said Clarence, "I will refuse to answer another question," and there was a ring in his voice which told the father that the son meant what he said.

"Where did she come from?"

"She was born at Pagham, a little village in Sussex on the English Channel."

"And she is gone with Bertha as her companion?" He had intended to say "your accomplice."

"Yes."

"Where have they gone?"

"They are on their way to Paris. Bertha wished to visit her friend and I thought it was all right for her to go."

"Then that story you told me about her going away in a carriage with Jack De Vinne was a lie?"

Clarence could not help smiling as he replied: "Well, I must confess it was not a very close approach to the truth."

"I judged not," said his father. "I did not believe it when you told me. You said Bertha was going to stay with a friend in Paris. What is her name and where does she live?"

"She is the Countess Mont d'Oro, and she lives at 22, Rue St. Francis."

"Is Jack De Vinne in Paris?"

"I presume he is at Noxton Hall," was Clarence's guarded reply. He did not think it necessary or advisable to tell his father that he had written Jack the morning that his wife and Bertha had left London that the latter was on her way to Paris to become the guest of the Countess Mont d'Oro.

There was silence for some time. Clarence grew impatient and turned his head. His father was evidently in deep thought.

"That will do," he said at last. "I hope you have told me the truth. If you have not, I shall soon find out the extent of your deception. I shall leave to-

night for London and will go to Paris to-morrow morning. Mr. Lake will be your companion until I return. If I find my ward is still Miss Renville, and I bring her back with me, I will dismiss the case against you. If she is married, Mr. Lake will escort you to London and you will have to stand the consequences of your very foolish action. I shall be obliged to take charge of my London business again, for I shall be a comparatively poor man when Miss Renville, or Mrs. Whatever-her-name-may-be, demands her inheritance, for, no doubt, you have told her that she is a rich woman by right."

Clarence sprang to his feet. "I have not told her one word. She has heard nothing from me."

Nor had she, nor did Clarence know that his wife had found the secret too much to keep and had unbosomed herself to Bertha on the way to Pagham.

Just after dinner, while Mr. Glynne was busily engaged making preparations for his journey, Brinkley, the butler, told him that a young man who looked as though he had just come from the country wished to see Mr. Clarence.

"Show him into the library," said Mr. Glynne.

When he entered it, he found a young man standing first on one foot and then on the other and twirling his hat nervously.

Mr. Glynne closed the library door. "What did you wish to see my son for?"

"I've got somethin' private to tell him."

"I'm sorry to say that he is very sick and can see no one. I am his father; you can tell me, and when he is in a condition to listen, I will communicate the intelligence to him."

"If he's sick," said the young man, "I don't think the news I got fer him will make him any better."

Mr. Glynne began to think that the young man had something of importance to communicate. "Have a

seat, sir. You can tell your story much better sitting than you can standing."

The young man looked intently at the luxurious easy-chair. He was more used to a hard bench than to upholstered furniture. He finally sat down, but stood up again as he felt the springs give way beneath him.

"Oh, you'll find it all right," said Mr. Glynne, "and very comfortable," and he took his accustomed position at the library table. "Now, I won't ask you any questions," said he, "but will let you tell your story in your own way."

The young man sidled to the edge of the chair which seemed more capable of supporting him, and began his story:

"My name is Silas Jubb and I live down in Pagham."

Mr. Glynne was all attention.

"My chum's name is Job Carder. He's all knocked up and he couldn't come, so he sent me."

Mr. Glynne thought it was time to reassure the young man. "Yes," he said, "my son's wife was born in Pagham. She left London yesterday morning on her way to Paris, in company with a friend, and I understood from my son that they were to sail from Pagham."

"Well, they won't get there," said Silas, with a shake of his head; "that's what I'm here for."

Mr. Glynne felt the blood rushing to his head, and his pulse quickened. "There has been an accident," he thought. But he would ask no questions.

"Job's father named his boat the *Dart* cuz it was the fastest craft of the kind in town, but it wuz run down by one of them Navy vessels in the Channel and Job's father and Bill Merry and George Danks and the two women was drowned. Job was the only one picked up, and he's 'most dead. You see, afore the *Dart* set sail, the women told Job's father to get word to your son if

they reached the other side all right. As they didn't, when Job came to, he thought as how you'd be anxious to know how things wuz and that's what he sent me up for."

"It was very thoughtful of him," said Mr. Glynne, "and very kind of you to bring us the sad news."

He had never felt such a strong impulse of generosity. He gave the young man a five-pound note, saying as he did so: "You can divide with your chum."

The young man had arisen and put on his hat. His hand went to the brim by way of salute. "He'll be glad to git it, for the loss of the boat'll come hard on him. I told him before I started as how I thought I'd find you to be a gentleman, cuz the ladies wuz so fine."

Mr. Glynne rang for Brinkley and told him to supply the man with a substantial meal before he started on his journey back to Pagham.

Five pounds! But the news was surely worth that and more.

"A great sorrow for Clarence, but such a solace for me," was Thomas Glynne's uppermost thought. The fortune was now his, if Clarence would hold his tongue.

His son's sickness, the grave nature of which had led him to assure Mr. Jubb that he could not see him, did not keep Mr. Glynne from breaking the news at the earliest opportunity. He had not anticipated the result which followed. Perhaps, if he had, he would have told the story in a gentler manner.

Clarence was prostrated by the intelligence. By midnight his condition was so alarming that Brinkley was obliged to start off in the darkness to bring a doctor.

Brain fever, was the physician's decision after he had made his diagnosis. Compared with many others, Clarence was a weak man both physically and mentally. He had been on the rack for twenty-four hours, and this great blow was more than he could bear. His brain

gave way and he lay there with only the ministrations of the hired nurses, growing thinner and weaker every day.

Did his father wish him to live? Only the Great Power that knows all hearts could have answered that question.



CHAPTER IX.

NEWS OF THE FUGITIVES.

"Do you think it shows a proper regard for the memory of your dead brother to go to Paris and take part in its frivolities?"

The question was asked by the Earl of Noxton.

"I am not going to Paris for any such purpose, and I think it unjust to me for you to entertain such a thought," said Jack. "I have received a letter which makes it absolutely necessary for me to go there; besides, I must have a change. I feel my brother's death much more than you credit me with. It throws responsibilities upon me which I had never thought to assume. I shall notify the Admiralty that I do not wish an assignment at present."

"I shall close up Noxton Hall," said the Earl, "and go to Scotland with the Countess. Amid the solitude of our northern home we shall be much more likely to appreciate the lesson taught us by our sad bereavement. Both your mother and I had thought you would accompany us."

"My stay in Paris will be short," said Jack, "and I will give you my word that when my business there is attended to I will join you in Scotland."

"I presume I shall have to be satisfied with that," said the Earl. "I have no desire to command the heir to the Earldom of Noxton, if he is deaf to my entreaties."

Jack went to Paris. He had been there before when a student, and his associates on that occasion had been

those suited to his position in life. Now all was changed.

He had no difficulty in securing an introduction to the Countess Mont d'Oro, for an Earl's son and heir is always *persona grata*. He received a warm welcome from that lady. Perhaps his greeting would not have been so cordial if almost his first inquiry had not been, "Has Miss Renville arrived?"

"Why, no," said the Countess. "I wrote and asked her to come and said that I should be delighted to see her. You see I knew her father well. But I have received no word from her that she intended to make the visit at present."

Jack could not conceal his agitation. "There must be some mistake here," he cried. "Read this letter, my dear Countess, and tell me what you think," and he passed her Clarence's letter.

"I cannot understand the matter at all," said the Countess, as she returned the letter. "I will write to Mr. Glynne at once. Come and see me day after tomorrow. Mr. Glynne will probably write me that her departure was postponed for some good reason."

Jack forgot his promise, or rather statement, to his father, that he did not intend to visit Paris to engage in its frivolities. In his state of mind some distraction was absolutely necessary. "If I cannot stop thinking I shall go mad," he said to himself, and he at once became immersed in the whirl of gaiety for which Paris is famous, though his interest therein was of the head rather than of heart.

On the appointed day he called on the Countess Mont d'Oro, but there was no letter from England. On the third day the Countess again shook her head, but on the fourth, in response to his inquiring glance, she said:

"I have a letter, but I am afraid to read it to you."

"I can bear anything better than this suspense," said Jack.

Then the Countess read Mr. Glynne's letter.

"DEAR MADAM:

"Your letter received. I should have answered it sooner but for the dangerous illness of my son, who is at death's door. In reply to your inquiry, I can only say that I have been informed by what I consider good authority that my ward, Miss Renville, left for London, in company with my son's wife, on their way to Paris, your residence being their presumed destination. Instead of taking the boat from Dover to Calais, which would have offered a safe and speedy passage, for some as yet unexplained reason they chose to make the voyage in a fishing vessel which was run down in the Channel, and all on board, with the exception of the captain's son, were drowned. I regret that I cannot give you any further particulars. If I learn anything more concerning the sad affair, I shall be pleased to communicate with you. I have the honour to be, dear madam,

"Your most obedient servant,

"THOMAS GLYNNE."

"Drowned!" cried Jack, "and I loved her so. Oh, madam, this blow would be easier to bear if, when I had the opportunity, I had told her that I loved her. I think she knew it, but I did not speak. I was the second son of an earl with no prospect but a minor position in the Navy. My brother is dead and I am now heir to the title and estates. You knew this, of course, before, but I tell you again to show you how foolish I was not to speak when I had the chance. All would have come out right; now all has gone wrong, and I am the one to blame. If I had told her that I loved her and we had been engaged, she never would have made the trip in this foolish way. Yes, madam, I am to blame and I shall never forgive myself."

Countess Mont d'Oro was a practical, sensible woman.

Instead of expressing sympathy for the young man in his almost uncontrollable grief, she used common sense.

"I do not think you have any right to blame yourself in any way for this sad affair. You were not, even in the remotest degree, the cause of it. If she had been engaged to you and had received my letter, she would have made the journey in just the same way, but instead of your receiving the news of it from her guardian's son, she would, no doubt, have written to you herself and would have told you that she was going to make the trip on the fishing schooner so that her guardian could not follow her, for you remember that young Mr. Glynne says in his letter that her guardian had refused his permission for her to visit me. Now, we must hope for the best. Miss Renville's guardian has the first report of the accident. One was saved and he, naturally, thinks that the others were lost. They may have been picked up by some vessel and we may hear from them within a few days."

"You give me hope," said Jack, "but I must confess that it is only a faint one. Dying men clutch at straws, they say, and I will grasp what you offer me."

"Come and see me every day," said the Countess. "I am a widow with one son about your age. I must confess that he is not a very affectionate or dutiful young man so far as his mother is concerned. Some sons are that way."

"Yes, a good many are that way," said Jack, "when they are young, but many of them reform when they grow older, and make up by their devotion for their past neglect."

"I see," said the Countess, "you are holding out a straw to me. I hope yours will prove a more substantial one than mine is likely to be."

Jack called on the Countess every day. On one of his visits the Countess told him that her son was betrothed to a beautiful young girl who lived at Alfieri

in Corsica. "That is my present home," she added. "I was born in Italy; my husband, the late Count, was a native of Corsica, though of Italian ancestry."

A week passed and still no tidings. "I can bear this no longer," said Jack to the Countess. "My hope has died out. I know that the worst has happened and the dream of my life is gone forever. I had intended to stop in London and ask the Admiralty not to assign me to a post in the Navy, but I learn there are rumours of a coming war. Russia's aggressions in the Crimea are resented not only by this country, but by my own, and I heard to-day that the King of Sardinia is disposed to form a triple alliance against the Muscovite. I shall go back to London to-morrow and request that I be assigned at once to some position of duty."

"I would advise you not to do it," said the Countess.

"You have been very kind to me," said Jack. "Please make your advice more explicit. What do you think it best for me to do?"

"You said your father and mother were going to Scotland. What is your address there?"

"Cobleigh Towers. It is on the Scottish side of the Tweed, opposite Berwick. Let me see. Oh, if my letters are sent to Carlisle they will reach me."

"Well, my advice is," said the Countess, "that you rejoin your father and mother and be as patient as you can for the next ten days. If by that time I receive no word, I, too, shall lose hope. I will then agree with you that the best way to dull your sorrow will be to choose a life of action; that and labour are the only panaceas for such grief."

"I will do it," said Jack. "I will do anything to please you."

Another week passed. The Countess still hoped from day to day, but each night saw no fruition. One morning, as the Countess was reclining in her boudoir, reading the monthly report of the steward of her Cor-

sican estate, her maid announced that there were two young ladies in the drawing-room who wished to see her.

It was some time before the Countess had made the necessary change in dress and descended to greet her visitors. She surveyed, with a look akin to astonishment, the two very pretty young ladies who came forward to greet her. The one with dark hair spoke first.

"Is this Countess Mont d'Oro?"

The Countess bowed.

"I am Mrs. Glynne—Mrs. Clarence Glynne—and this is my friend Miss——"

She did not have an opportunity to complete the sentence, for the Countess stepped forward quickly and clasped the other young girl in her arms.

"And this is my dear little girl, Bertha Renville. I was your father's friend and I will be yours. But how were you saved? We heard that all on board the fishing boat were drowned."

"If we had been men," cried Jennie, "we should have been drowned too. We were thrown into the water by the collision, but our dresses saved our lives. They would not have done so had we remained in the water long enough for them to get saturated, but they held us up, and we were seen by one of the officers on Her Majesty's frigate *Victoria* which ran us down. The young man who saw us was a lieutenant. He had the vessel stopped and came to our rescue in a boat. Oh, I think he was just the loveliest young man I ever met in my life, don't you, Bertha?"

"A very natural thought," said the Countess, with a smile. "Young ladies are very apt to fall in love with handsome young men who save their lives."

Bertha flushed perceptibly. She thought of the Thames and one who had saved her life on a previous occasion.

"And he had such a romantic name," said Jennie.

"Of course I would not think of falling in love with him for I am a married woman, but I suppose there is no harm in my falling in love with his name—Claude Levaille, he said it was."

"But where have you been all this time?" asked the Countess.

"Oh, that's the strangest part of it," said Jennie. "Come, Bertha, I have done all the talking so far. You must tell the rest of the story."

"It is a very simple one," said Bertha. "The frigate was bound for Marseilles. The admiral said he would have been delighted to put us ashore at some point near Paris, but he was under strict orders to proceed at once to the Mediterranean."

"Oh, yes, I know," said the Countess. "Mr. De Vinne told me that there was likelihood of a war with Russia."

"Jack De Vinne?" cried Mrs. Glynne. "Has he been here?"

"For a long time," said the Countess. "He has been here every day to see if I had any news about you. He is a very sad, unhappy young man. He has gone to his father's place in Scotland. I must write at once and tell him of your safety. Perhaps, though, it would be better if Miss Renville would write him. I will give you his address."

"Oh, yes, that will be much better," said Jennie. "And now that I have delivered you into the arms of your friend, the Countess," she added, "I must go right back to London. I have no doubt that my husband is distracted."

"Will you excuse me, Bertha?" said the Countess. "I cannot call you Miss Renville, it is too formal."

"Nor do I wish you to," said Bertha. "No one calls me Miss Renville, except——"

"Mr. De Vinne," said Jennie, with a laugh, "but he won't much longer."

"Mrs. Glyune," said the Countess, "I have something to tell you," and she led her into an anteroom.

"What is it," cried Jennie. "My husband, Clarence, is he dead?"

"Oh, no," said the Countess, "but his father writes me that he is very sick, prostrated, no doubt, by the news of your supposed death. He is at his father's residence; I forget——"

"Oh, I know," said Jennie—"Buckholme. I have never been there. We were secretly married. Perhaps you do not know, but Clarence's father wished him to marry Bertha, but he couldn't because I was his wife, but his father didn't know that. I suppose it is all out now and I'm glad of it. I will go to him at once."

Jennie hurried with all speed to London and took the first train thence for Buckholme. The thought uppermost in her mind was as to what her reception by Clarence's father would be, and her first question after greeting her husband was:

"Where is your father, Clarence?"

"Gone to seek Bertha, dear," he answered, wearily, "but I hope a kind Providence will prevent his ever finding her."

"Amen," exclaimed Jennie, reverently.

CHAPTER X.

"LA GRANDE PASSION."

AFTER Jennie's departure, the Countess gave herself up entirely to the pleasure which she found in the company of her young guest.

"I knew your father, Oscar Renville, I may say, intimately. It was after the death of your mother, but my husband was then living. I was in Corsica when your father died. I would gladly have taken you as my own, for I must confess that when my son was born I was very sorry he was not a daughter instead. It was only a short time ago that I learned Mr. Glynne had adopted you."

"No," said Bertha, "he never adopted me. He is, or rather was, my guardian."

"Has he more than one child?"

"Only one son, Clarence. His father wished him to marry me, but although Clarence was always kind to me—really the best friend I had at Buckholme—he never proposed to me. I thought several times that he was on the point of doing so, but I can see now why he did not."

"I think he would have done so," said the Countess, "if it had not been for a previous love affair."

"Oh, it was not that," cried Bertha. "He knew me long before he became acquainted with his present wife; but it may have been so after all, for I was only sixteen."

If Clarence Glynne had been lukewarm in his love-making, Bertha soon found that Count Napier Mont

d'Oro was the exact reverse. On his part, at least, it was a case of love at first sight. He declared to his friend, the Marquis Caussade, that for the first time in his life he had an attack of *la grande passion*. He tried in every way to make himself agreeable to Bertha.

"Will you go driving with me?" he asked, one morning. "Paris never looked more beautiful than it will to-day. The environs are even more attractive than the city itself."

"I will ask the Countess," said Bertha.

"And so my son wishes you to go driving with him, does he?" was the Countess's reply to Bertha's question. "I have no right to command you, but my advice is to refuse. Some people have told me that my son is a very bad young man. I am not personally cognisant of his misdoings, nor do I wish to be, but I do not think it best for you to become too well acquainted with him."

"I shall certainly do as you say," replied Bertha.

All of the Count's attempts to make Bertha his companion were flat failures and he decided to adopt another course. A new opera was about to be given. The tickets were held at extravagant figures, but the Count secured a box.

"Oh, you are musical!" he exclaimed, one day as he entered the drawing-room and found Bertha seated at the piano.

"I play a little for my own amusement," said she.

"Have you any objection to my listening?"

"Oh, not at all! I trust you will not find it irksome."

He was extravagant in his praises of her performance, but Bertha had learned to take his remarks at their true value.

He did not ask Bertha to go to the opera with him, but invited his mother instead.

"I have a box," he said.

"Are you going to make up a party?"

"Oh, no, I will go with you."

"Have you asked Bertha?"

"Certainly not," he replied. "I have asked her to accompany me on several occasions, but she has always refused; I presume at your instigation. To speak plainly, I do not care whether she goes with us to the opera or not."

He knew that this would pique his mother.

"Well, if Bertha cannot go, I shall not go," said the Countess.

"If you choose to ask her to accompany you, I certainly shall not object, but, as I said before, I do not care whether she goes or not."

He did not repeat this conversation to Bertha and the Countess herself was too politic to refer to it.

Every day, thereafter, the Count virtually haunted the drawing-room in the hope of finding Bertha at the piano. On one occasion he was successful.

"Will you not play for me?" he asked.

"You have heard my repertoire."

"Do you not sing?"

"Very little; only the simplest of English ballads."

He took a piece of music from the rack and placed it before her. "Can you play that?"

"I can try."

"If you will, I shall be your debtor."

"I cannot sing it."

"Excuse me," he said, "but I did not ask you to."

It was a tenor song. Bertha played the prelude, but was astonished when she struck the first note of the vocal score to hear the Count's voice take up the melody. He had a pure, sweet voice, and sang with great power and expression.

"It is a beautiful song; do you not think so?" he asked.

"Very," was her laconic reply.

"Now, will you not sing for me one of those English ballads?"

Bertha had enjoyed the Count's song, and she felt it would be discourteous to refuse under the circumstances.

The piece was a solo, but when she had sung several lines the Count joined in, singing in English.

"Encore! Encore!!" he cried, and they sang the second stanza together.

"You must be a good musician," said Bertha, "to sing a part so well that is not in the music."

"I am glad to hear that there is some good in me," he remarked, gravely. "I am a thousand times your debtor, Miss Renville, both for your singing and your compliment, which I shall never forget."

The night for the opera came, and as the Count, with his dark, handsome face, leaned forward, from time to time, to discuss the performance with the fair-haired English girl, scores of opera-glasses were turned in their direction. Count Napier Mont d'Oro had scored the point for which he had been working so long—he had been seen in public with the beautiful woman whom he loved, for the time being at least, and that satisfied him.

The next day the Countess was sitting in her boudoir reading the criticisms of the opera and the performance. At the close of the article in one of the papers were some items referring to the prominent personages who were present on the opening night. Her own name caught her eye, and she read an item which caused her to clench her hands until her finger-nails almost cut into the flesh, as she exclaimed: "The villain! I was a fool to trust him." Then she read the item again:

"It is rumored that a certain young Count, one of the *jeunesse dorée*, and member of a prominent Corsican family, has become greatly enamoured of a beautiful young English girl who is visiting here. They were

seen together at the opera, and if what was apparent in the past is an indication of what will take place in the future, Parisian society will be adorned, at no distant date, by another of England's fairest daughters."

Before the Countess had recovered from the vexation which the perusal of the item had caused her, the boudoir door was suddenly opened and Bertha ran into the room. She threw herself upon her knees, buried her face in the Countess's lap, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Why, what's the matter, my dear?" exclaimed the Countess. "What has happened?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you!" cried Bertha.

"But, really, you must," said the Countess. "Who in my house has dared to offend you?"

"He did not mean it as an offence—they never do—but it was so unexpected—I have never given him any reason."

"Why, what are you talking about?" exclaimed the now astonished Countess. "Do be explicit. I have just read something in the paper that has made me very angry."

The girl wiped away the tears from her reddened eyes and said: "Why did he do it?"

"Do what?" exclaimed the Countess. "Do speak, or I shall have to cry myself."

Bertha began to weep again, but through her tears she managed to say: "Your son—the Count—asked me to be his wife."

"Oh, the young scapegrace!" said the Countess, jumping to her feet. "Why, my dear, he is engaged to another woman, where we live, in Corsica. You stay here. I will go downstairs and have a talk with him. He shall leave the house this very day."

"Oh, don't turn him out on my account," cried Bertha. "Do not, my dear Countess. I will go instead. This is his home and I have no right here."

"Well, I have," said the Countess, defiantly. "This is my house, and while I live it has a mistress, but no master."

The Countess soon discovered that her son was in the drawing-room where the avowal of love had been made. He was seated at the piano, touching the keys lightly and humming an air.

"So, my young man," the Countess exclaimed, "you are at your old tricks again."

"Yes," said the Count. "You had me taught to play the piano, and I have always loved it."

"You know that's not what I mean. If you would give more time to music and less to making love to people who do not appreciate it, it would be better for yourself and for me. What did you mean by insulting my guest?"

"Is it an insult," he asked, "to ask a young lady to become a Countess?"

The Countess paused. "Perhaps not," she said, "if you had any right to ask her, but you have not. What would you say if I told Vivienne?"

"I should say," said the Count, "what would, no doubt, seem to be very impolite."

"You would tell me to mind my own business, I presume," said the Countess; "it is not an uncommon remark with you. Well, I am going to mind it. This is my house and I have only allowed you to remain here on sufferance. Either you or I must go." She thought for a moment before she spoke again. "Yes, we will go. Bertha has never seen the world and I will give her an opportunity. You may stay in Paris. I shall not tell you where we are going, for, to borrow the words which you thought but did not speak, I do not consider it is any of your affair. If you discover where we are, and follow us, and speak a word of love to my guest, or even hint at it, I will tell Pascal Batistelli."

The Countess was as good as her word. On the second day her preparations were completed, and on the morning of the third she left Paris, without informing her son as to her destination.

The Count really felt his rejection severely. He had been attracted to Bertha and as far as it lay in him to feel affection for any one, he really loved her. Night after night of dissipation followed his rejection and the consequent departure of Bertha from Paris. It was nearly one o'clock when he returned home one morning. His latch-key gave him admission to the house, and he would have gone upstairs at once to his room if he had not noticed a long, thin ray of light coming from the library. He went on tiptoe to the door and listened. He heard a sound like that of a file upon metal. His first thought was that it was a burglar. He was unarmed, but he had a sturdy frame and a pair of stout fists. He kicked the door open violently, rushed into the room, and pounced upon a man who was on his knees before the safe, which contained the family papers and valuables. He caught the man by the collar and threw him violently upon his back.

"Ah, Jacques, it is you, is it? What the devil are you up to?"

When the Countess left Paris, only three servants were retained. These were Jacques, the coachman; Timothée, the butler, or *major domo*; and Francine, the cook, who was Timothée's fiancée. It was but natural that Timothée should spend his evenings in the kitchen with Francine, and this fact, the Count quickly reasoned, was what had given Jacques his opportunity to rob the safe.

"Why don't you speak, you rascal?" cried the Count. "Were you trying to rob the safe?"

The man sat up. In one hand he held a key and in the other a small file. "No, sir. Not quite so bad as that. I don't suppose you will believe me, but I will

tell you the truth. Before the young lady went away she gave me a letter and said if a certain young gentleman called for it, to give it to him. I have carried it in my pocket so long that it was becoming crumpled and soiled, and I thought I would put it in the safe. I had this key and it nearly fitted; that is why I was using it."

"I may believe it," said the Count, "but I don't think the judge will to-morrow. But where's the letter? You may get up."

Jacques passed the letter to the Count. The handwriting was Bertha's and it was addressed to Mr. De Vinne.

"You may get up," repeated the Count. "Give me that key. I will take charge of the letter and see that it is delivered when the young gentleman comes for it. I don't believe a word you have told me except that you had the letter. Thieves always leave some loop-hole to crawl through."

The man went out. The Count examined the safe to see that it was securely locked, and then went upstairs to his room.

"Mr. De Vinne! I suppose he is her English lover. But why should he come here? What a foolish question! Of course if he knew she was here he would come. I would go to the ends of the earth to see her if I knew where she had gone. Perhaps this letter will tell. Well, I have done worse things than open a letter addressed to another man." As he spoke he broke the seal and read:

"MY DEAR MR. DE VINNE:

"I am very sorry to hear of the sudden death of your brother, and you have my deepest sympathy in your affliction. I came here with Mrs. Glynne, the wife of Mr. Clarence Glynne, the son of my guardian. You have, no doubt, heard that our little craft was run down

in the Channel by a large vessel. By God's providence we escaped. The vessel was under orders to proceed at once to Marseilles, and we could not land until they reached there. We arrived safely in Paris and I have been the guest of Countess Mont d'Oro. She has invited me to go with her to her estate in Corsica and we shall leave to-morrow. She says that a letter addressed to Alfieri, near Ajaccio, Corsica, will not fail of delivery.

"Your friend,

"BERTHA RENVILLE."

"Ha!" said the Count. "A very fortunate find. So they have gone to Corsica. Well, I have as much right to visit Corsica as they have and I think I will go. Vivienne says that she does not love me and that if I make love to anybody else our engagement is off; but I don't believe it will turn out that way. Corsican women are all jealous. If she finds that I am flirting with some one else, she will probably begin to love me a little, and if I keep up the affair, in time she may become madly infatuated. By St. Christopher, what fun it will be, and how my honoured mother will enjoy it."

The next day there was a violent storm of wind and rain. The Count did not venture out. "I will get ready for my visit to Corsica," he said to himself. About noon he was summoned by Timothée, who said a gentleman wished to see him in the library.

The visitor was a stout man with a full, round face, made even fuller and rounder by a thick beard.

"I wish to see the Countess Mont d'Oro."

"I regret to say, sir, that she is absent from the city. I am Count Mont d'Oro, her son."

"Is Miss Renville here?" was the next inquiry.

"She has been my mother's guest—they have gone together."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the stout man. "I am Mr. Thomas Glynne, of Buckholme, in Berkshire. I am the young lady's guardian. She ran away from home with the intention, I think, of marrying a chance acquaintance—an unworthy young man—and I have come to Paris to take her home with me as I have a right to do, under the law."

"Who is this unworthy young man?" asked the Count.

"His name is De Vinne."

"I judge," said the Count, "from something I have heard, that she is in love with him. I know that she writes to him and that she was expecting him here before she left Paris."

"Shall I presume too much upon your kindness," said Mr. Glynne, "if I ask you where my ward has gone?"

The Count did not answer the question. "You say, Mr. Glynne, that your ward and this young man were but chance acquaintances; why is he so anxious to marry her—because she is beautiful, because she is rich, or both?"

Mr. Glynne thought that the truth might improve his position. "She has a large fortune in her own right—forty thousand pounds in our money; about a million francs in yours."

The Count gave a long, low whistle. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but that would make a fine dowry."

"If Mr. De Vinne comes to Paris, I presume you will tell him where my ward has gone?"

"Well, really, I do not think I shall," said the Count. "The information came into my possession in rather a peculiar manner and I must protect the person who gave it to me. You will be surprised, sir, at something I am going to tell you. I have met Miss Renville and I have fallen in love with her myself. I did not know at the time that she was wealthy, but that makes little

difference to me; in fact, no difference at all, for I have money enough of my own and would marry her without a dowry as soon as with one. Who has charge of her fortune?"

"I have," answered Mr. Glynne.

"And no doubt you would like to keep it." The Count smiled as he uttered the words. The smile was contagious and one flickered across Mr. Glynne's fat, round face.

"I should not be human," he replied, "if I would not."

"Well," said the Count, "two heads are better than one. I will make a bargain with you. If you will give your consent to my marrying your ward, and will help me to bring about that happy event, I will take her without a dowry and you may keep the money. Is it a bargain?"

"I must confess that such a course of action would be very agreeable to me."

"Well, I shan't tell you," said the Count, "where your ward is. I will take you with me, if you will go. I will leave you in a place several miles distant from where I know she is living, and you must remain there until I have had time to prosecute my suit. At the critical moment I shall call upon you for your assistance. Is that plan satisfactory to you?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Glynne.

"If Mr. De Vinne comes to Paris," said the Count, "he will find it difficult to ascertain your ward's whereabouts. We shall leave for our destination to-morrow morning; in the meantime I shall be pleased to have you as my guest."

The next day the allies started upon their journey, one influenced by thoughts of love, the other by thoughts of gold.

It is an old saying that the devil leaves his followers half-way. Even the most astute of men will do some

foolish thing that upsets his plans. Count Mont d'Oro was no exception to the rule.

Jacques, the coachman, had told the truth. He was devoted to the Countess and she trusted him implicitly. No sooner was Jacques certain that the Count had left the house than he made his way to his master's rooms. He ransacked them from one end to the other. "He would not take it with him," he soliloquised. "Perhaps he destroyed it. I have looked over carefully everything that came from his room, but it was not there. He has had no fire and he could not have burned it. Ah! I have not looked into that," he exclaimed, as he espied a square wooden box on the top of a chiffonier. In a moment it was in his possession. It was locked, but Jacques had brought a screw-driver with him for possible use, and the cover was soon wrenched off. It was full of letters.

"He read my letter," said Jacques, "I will read his." There were daintily written and perfumed epistles, love letters from ladies of the *haut ton*, both married and single, who now wished, no doubt, that their missives were back in their own hands or burned. Jacques threw them aside one after another. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "what a miserable flirt he is. I am so sorry he caught me and found out where that beautiful young lady is gone; but the Countess will protect her." Suddenly he gave a cry of delight. At the bottom of the box was the letter for which he had been searching.

As fate willed it, on the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Jack De Vinne, heir to the Earldom of Noxton, presented himself at the residence of Countess Mont d'Oro in Paris. He had been to Buckholme, had seen Clarence, and learned from his wife that Mr. Thomas Glynne had gone to Paris in search of his ward.

"He is gone to bring her back," said Jennie. "I do not know whether English law holds in France or not, but they say possession is nine points of the law, and I

am sure the Countess will not give her up if there is any way of keeping her."

It so happened that it was the French Jacques who admitted the English Jack.

The Countess's faithful servitor placed the letter in the hands of the one for whom it was intended, explaining, as best he could, how it came to be opened.

"The Count and a big, stout man went away this very morning. They may have gone to Corsica, but I do not know."

Jack felt sure that they had, and the next morning he was on his way thither.



CHAPTER XI.

A CORSICAN CHANT.

IF one could rise in the air like a bird and look down upon the island of Corsica, he might think that he saw before him the petrified skeleton of some great marine monster. From north to south, through the centre of the island, runs a ridge of mountains resembling a spinal column, while upon either side of this central ridge branch a number of shorter parallel ridges bearing a close resemblance to the ribs of such an animal. In each of these valleys, near the central ridge, are the sources of small rivers which run east or west, as the case may be, into the Mediterranean Sea. The banks are composed of alluvial soil, and, for that reason, near the sea the rivers widen out, covering large areas of land which become marshes, full, at certain seasons of the year, of pestilential vapours, the cause of disease and death among the inhabitants. The sides of the mountains and the borders of the adjacent ravines are covered by dense masses of shrubbery and groves or forests of trees. In Australia, the outlaw, fleeing from justice, takes refuge in "the bush," from which circumstance he has derived the characteristic name of "bushranger." On the other hand, the Corsican outlaws or banditti take refuge, when pursued by the officers of the law, in the *maquis*, which, in the Corsican vernacular, has the same meaning as the Australian "bush."

In one of the deepest of the ravines on the western side of the central ridge of mountains which traverses the island of Corsica, a band of some twenty men was

assembled. They were nondescript in appearance, each being dressed after a fashion of his own, although there was one point of resemblance between them, for each was armed with a rifle, had a pair of pistols in his belt, and a closer examination would have revealed a stiletto hidden away beneath the folds of his shirt or jacket. They were what they appeared to be—Corsican banditti or, in other words, outlaws—men wanted by the police—chiefly for murder.

And yet they were different from the usual banditti which infest Corsica, as a closer acquaintance with their leader will soon determine. He was a man of gigantic stature and the possessor of great physical strength. He was seated apart from the members of his band in company with his lieutenant, a man much smaller in size, but muscular and agile, as a natural result of a continual outdoor life.

The leader was called Cromillian. No one of his band supposed that this was his real name, but he offered no explanation and none was asked. He had suddenly appeared in Corsica, gathered a band of trusted followers, and for a year had carried on a peculiar system of brigandage. As the plan followed by him supplied his adherents with the means of subsistence, they ventured no criticism of his peculiar manner of doing business, although they often wondered among themselves as to what the final outcome of it would be.

The lieutenant's name was Paoli, and, although next in command to Cromillian, he had no clearer idea of his leader's ultimate object than had the other members of the band. The wild, roving life suited him and he was content to remain where he was, for he had long ago forfeited his rights as a law-abiding citizen and was a marked man in the eyes of the emissaries of the law.

It is a natural characteristic of some people, when they have nothing else to do, to think of the present

or to look forward to the future; but a Corsican, when he has time for contemplation, always reverts to the past. When he recalls it, he does not dwell upon its pleasant features, but, if possible, fastens his thoughts upon some real or imaginary wrong which he fancies his ancestors or his friends have suffered.

An American Indian, when contemplating an attack upon his enemies, precedes active hostilities by singing a war song, and the Corsican unconsciously resembles him by singing, or rather chanting, a recital of past wrongs or injuries, followed by a unique vocal declaration of his intention to secure reparation or execute vengeance for such acts.

The Corsicans are strong partisans. They not only take part in the feuds with which their own families are connected, but embrace the causes of other families to which they are not related, but to which, for some reason or other, they become attached.

Paoli sat upon a log, his hands tightly clasped together, gazing up at the sky through a rift in the branches of the trees. There was a wild look in his eye, such as might be seen in those of some religious devotee. Suddenly, as though under the influence of some magic power or spell, he found voice. The words of his chant, or *vocero*, as it is called by the Corsicans, certainly boded no good fortune to a person named Vandemar, who was referred to therein:

“Place on the wall before my bed my cross of honour well gained. To my sons, my sons in a far country, convey my cross and bloody vest. He, my first-born, will see the rents—for each rent, a rent in another shirt, a wound in another’s heart! Vengeance! The hour of vengeance is nigh! Make ready his bed in the valley of skulls. He comes, the last of his race, but he comes to his couch with a stain on his shroud, only to die. The vendetta, the spirit of vendetta is awake; it has slept too long. Blood for blood! The noble house of Batis-



COUNTESS MONT D'ORO



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telli no longer shall bear the dread reproach of *rimbec-care*. The stain shall now be washed away in blood. Vandemar Della Coscia must die!"

Cromillian's attention had been attracted by the first words of the chant and he listened intently to the *im-provisatore*. When Paoli ceased, he turned and approached him:

"Thy heart rebukes thee whilst thou singest. There are whispers of other orgies than those thou hast sung. I, too, can improvise. Now listen, Paoli, and remember that I never chant the ancient gabble of old women and silly girls. I will make my own songs and, better still, I will make them come true, every word true. Listen, and be sure that you do not forget.

"The noble young Vandemar returns, returns to his native mountains, to the home of his childhood, to the friends who have waited so long to embrace him. But no sooner do his feet touch the shores, the green banks of his early home, than the hungry vultures are on his track eager to drink the red blood in his veins. But the eagle will turn to defend his life. He will not die. The death song will resound for his enemies, the vengeful tribe of the Batistellis. Even this clown, this fool Paoli, will change the tone of his song, ere long! Ere long!!"

Paoli took his chief's words pleasantly. "Hold on!" he cried. "Don't you know that they have an adage among the French: 'Never hit a man when he is down'?" As he said this, he arose:

"I am, as you well know, a descendant of the great Paoli, at whose name all Corsica thrilled, a just man, and the most distinguished general in the world."

"It is a great pity," said Cromillian, sarcastically, "that he is not living, and here to give advice to his kinsman. I know not whether it is an adage, but it is a well-known fact that the sons and grandsons of great men seldom resemble them."

"Your wits are too much for me," said Paoli, "but please have the grace to hear me out. It was a maxim of my illustrious ancestor that every citizen should constitute himself a soldier and defend his rights by force of arms. Not to avenge wrongs committed against one's own blood or that of his friends, has always been deemed by the Corsicans to denote a coward. I am a true son of Corsica and, for that, you call me a clown, a fool. If you and I were not sworn friends, there might be cause for a coolness between us. Heed this now, and say whether I was right or wrong.

"My dearest friend, Antonio Marcelli, had a beautiful sister, Vinetta. A man from Bastia, named Ossa d'Oria, came to Ajaccio. He was young and handsome, and reputed to be a single man. Young Vinetta was misled by him and, to conceal her shame, committed suicide. I wrote to Antonio, but he was down sick with a fever and unable to return to Corsica. I made my friend's cause my own and went to Bastia. I found that I was to be deprived of a sweet revenge, for the scoundrel had been drowned while bathing. His father was dead and he had no brothers or near relatives. But he had a wife. What was I to do?"

"That was embarrassing," Cromillian remarked. "What did you do?"

"This was one of the cases," answered Paoli, "where the flint of your gun must serve you. I put a ball through the head of the wife. That is what I call good old Corsican justice. Then I took to the mountains, and here I am, a jolly bandit like yourself."

Cromillian turned upon him, savagely: "You call that justice? I call it murder! Cold-blooded murder!! This savage custom of vengeance executed upon relatives for wrongs committed by an ancestor, the lives of sons sacrificed for fancied wrongs alleged against fathers, has been the curse and blight of Corsica for the last five hundred years. The vendetta, that hydra-

headed monster, strikes its fangs deep into the heart of every Corsican child before it is able to lisp its own name. Mothers lull their babies to sleep crooning the death song, nurses inflame their young imaginations with frightful stories of blood, revenge, and death. It has grown with their growth, strengthened with their strength, until to-day we stand before the world distinguished only as being the most savage, the most barbarous people upon the face of this fair earth."

"Do they say that of us?" asked Paoli.

"Listen!" said Cromillian, "I read in an old newspaper when I was in France that if the island of Corsica could vomit forth all the blood which has been poured out upon its soil, in the course of time, in the vendetta and on the field of battle, it would overwhelm its cities and villages, drown its people, and crimson the sea from its shores to Genoa. Six hundred and sixty-six thousand slain by the hand of the assassin alone! Dost like the picture?"

"Well," said Paoli, "what are we going to do about it? We take up life where our fathers left it."

"There is going to be a change, a reformation!" cried Cromillian. "I, with my single arm, with the help of God, will commence the work. There will, necessarily, be much bloodshed at first—there always has been in every case where great evils were to be overcome. My life will be sacrificed, but it will be in a good and merciful cause, and when I shall have done my work, some other man will take it up just where I leave it, and so it will go on until your children's children and mine may be able to look a civilised man in the face."

"Are you in earnest?" asked Paoli. "Do you mean it?"

"Mean it!" cried Cromillian. "Why did I leave a comfortable home in England, where I lived like a gentleman, to come here and turn bandit? Was it to

plunder, to rob, to execute vengeance? Answer me, Paoli. Why am I a voluntary outlaw, destined to know no other home on earth but that which the clefts in the rocks and mountains or the *maquis* afford me? Say, is it to rob, think you?"

"No, no, not that, surely!" cried Paoli. "I have been with you for a year and I know that you have only taken from the rich in order to give to the poor. I know you have so frightened several who had declared the vendetta and were on the tracks of their would-be victims that they have given up the pursuit. I have seen what you have done, although I could not understand your method. But what is to be our next work, if it is not an impertinent question?"

Cromillian eyed his interrogator closely: "Well," he said finally, "you have, undoubtedly, heard the rumour that Vandemar Della Coscia is to visit his native land, which he has not seen since he was a child."

"Yes, I know that," said Paoli, "and I know that the Batistellis will declare the vendetta against him if he dares to come. Now, my father was a friend of Conrad Batistelli, and I am a friend of the brothers, Pascal and Julien. I gave my word to my father on his death-bed that I would be true to the Batistellis, and their cause is my cause. If Pascal and Julien declare that Vandemar must die, I shall aid them. If I do not, I shall be false to the oath given to my father."

"You can do as you please," replied Cromillian, "but, from what I have told you, you know that I shall consider it my duty to protect Vandemar from the Batistellis, and from you. Besides, how do you know that Manuel Della Coscia killed Conrad Batistelli?"

"Why, there can be no doubt of it!" cried Paoli. "Was not Conrad found in his own field, stabbed to the heart by a stiletto, upon the handle of which were found the initials of Manuel Della Coscia? And did he not confess his guilt by fleeing from the island, taking his

little son with him? I cannot understand why Vandemar can have the temerity to return to Corsica when the case against his father and himself is so strong. He simply invites the doom which surely awaits him."

"I do not think he comes for any such reason," said Cromillian. "I think the result of his visit will be to show that his father was innocent of that crime and that the Batistellis have no cause for enmity against him."

"He will have no time to prove that," answered Paoli. "As soon as the Batistelli brothers know that he is in Corsica, his death will be but a question of a few hours."

"But supposing they do not know him?" said Cromillian. "Supposing they do not recognise him?"

"I am sure that I should know him," replied Paoli. "I knew his father well, and the sons of Corsicans too closely resemble their fathers to render his recognition improbable."

"I am not a rich man, as you know," said Cromillian, "but I'll wager ten louis d'or, Paoli, that, if you saw Vandemar Della Coscia, you would not know him."

"But if I do," cried Paoli, "and I point him out to the Batistellis, do I get the ten louis d'or?"

"If you point him out to me first," said Cromillian, "you will get the ten louis d'or. If you point him out to anybody else, what you will get will be determined hereafter. Is it a wager?" he asked.

"It is," cried Paoli, and the men shook hands.

Paoli could not refrain from referring again to the vendetta between the Batistellis and the Della Coscias.

"The Batistellis are rich and powerful," he began, "and who is there so bold as to think of contending against them?"

"I dare!" cried Cromillian. "I will shed every drop of my blood to prevent such diabolical injustice."

"But not with your single arm?" questioned Paoli.
"None could be found rash enough to join you in so mad a scheme."

"Yes, one will," answered Cromillian, "one who is trusty and true—my Protector!"

"Your Protector?" Paoli asked, inquiringly.

"There is my Protector," said Cromillian, pointing to his gun, "a double-barrelled orator who preaches the gospel right into a man every time. Of what use are the tongues of a hundred missionaries? When the gospel is preached in Corsica to-day, it must spring from the muzzle of a gun or the point of a stiletto; it must be forced into the people with leaden balls or shining steel. Come to my heart, faithful guardian!" As he spoke, he embraced his weapon with fervour: "Thou wilt be true to poor Corsica, and to me, defender of the right, protector of the innocent, friend of the poor, merciful to the just, who smiteth only to bless. Dear Goddess, I love thee! Swear that thou wilt be true to me; speak, let me hear thy voice." Raising his weapon, he discharged both barrels. Then he continued: "Sweeter to my ears is thy voice than the cooing of doves."

On the evening of the same day, and at about the same hour at which the colloquy had taken place between Cromillian and his lieutenant, Countess Mont d'Oro and Bertha had come to what was called, by the inhabitants of Alfieri, Mont d'Oro Castle.

It is usually dispiriting to arrive late in the afternoon at a house with which you have previously been unacquainted. The glorious morning sun is needed to bring out local beauties and points of interest which escape the attention when day is waning. Besides, Bertha was weary and nervous. The passage from Marseilles to Ajaccio had been made upon a sailing vessel, the accommodations of which were far from palatial. To add to their discomfiture, a storm had over-

taken them and the qualms of seasickness had been added to their other troubles. Again, the ride from Ajaccio to Alfieri had been made in a tumble-down vehicle over a rough road, and the Countess declared that every bone in her body was aching when she reached home. To this remark Bertha silently assented, for she said to herself that if the Countess felt any worse than she did, she must be miserable indeed.

There being no actual head to the household during the Countess's absence, it was in a most disordered condition at the time of their arrival, and considerable time passed before the energetic orders of the mistress secured a semblance of household unity and led to the preparation of a supper for the weary travellers.

Bertha retired early to her room. It was comfortable, even cosy, being located upon the third floor in one of those towers which are characteristic features of Corsican architecture. It was with a feeling of great relief that Bertha threw herself upon the couch; but she could not sleep. After a long period of wakefulness and tossing, she arose and went to the latticed window. The moon was shining brightly. She opened the lattice and looked out upon the beautiful grounds which surrounded the castle.

Suddenly, she started back. A high hedge divided the grounds belonging to the Mont d'Oro estate from that adjoining, but, from her elevated position, she commanded a full view of the grounds of the neighboring estate. The house was fully as imposing as that of Countess Mont d'Oro; in fact, more so, for while the Mont d'Oro mansion was built of wood, the one upon which she was now gazing was constructed of stone and seemed, as it was, a much more substantial building.

But it was not the building which had attracted her attention, although it presented an imposing appearance, lighted by the moon, with the portions in shadow

accentuating the sharp contrasts. No, what caught her eye and riveted her attention was the figure of a young girl dressed in white, who, standing in the moonlight, looked like some spirit rather than a human being. Bertha partially closed the lattice, leaving only a narrow space through which she could watch the strange figure, which stood motionless. She could not see the girl's face, for it was turned in the opposite direction and her dark hair, which was unfastened, shrouded even the side of her face from view.

It seemed a long time to Bertha that she sat there and watched the motionless figure. Suddenly, the sound of a voice fell upon her ear. She listened and, although she could not understand the words, she knew by the melody and the manner in which the song was sung that it was a boisterous drinking song. The voice came nearer, and soon the figure of a man entered the grounds where the young girl stood. At sight of him, she started forward with a glad cry which was distinctly audible to Bertha. Had she been waiting for a lover? The figure in white approached the man and threw her arms about his neck, but, to Bertha's surprise, the man repelled her advances, pushing her away from him with such violence that she fell to the ground.

Bertha started to her feet, full of indignation. It seemed as though she must go to the assistance of the young girl who had been so cruelly treated. She quickly realised the impossibility of such an action on her part and, resuming her seat, watched to see what would happen. The young girl rose slowly to her feet and disappeared within a doorway. The man, whoever he was, was evidently so intoxicated as to be unable to maintain a standing position, for, after several efforts to reach the door through which the young girl had gone, he lost his balance and fell prone to the ground. A few minutes later, the girl emerged from the doorway, accompanied by an old man and an old woman, and by their combined

efforts the drunken man was taken into the house, and the door closed behind them.

The next morning, after breakfast, while sitting in the Countess's boudoir, Bertha could not refrain from giving an account of what she had seen the previous night.

"Oh, that is a common occurrence," said the Countess. "The girl whom you saw was Vivienne Batistelli. The drunken man was her younger brother, Julien, who is going to the bad very fast, they say. Her elder brother, Pascal, is very correct in his habits, although of a very bitter and revengeful disposition. Julien is a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow, intent upon having a good time. As is often the case, the sister has no love for her elder brother, but bestows it all upon this young profligate. I used to do the same when my son was young.

"For a time, I thought he could do no wrong, no matter how badly he acted, but when he showed such complete disregard for my wishes, when he told me plainly that he intended to do as he pleased, no matter what I said or what I wished, there came a revulsion. Although I am his mother, I am not ashamed to say that instead of loving him, I came to hate the sight of him, and am never happy when he is near me. He is virtually betrothed, with the consent of her brother Pascal, to this Vivienne Batistelli, but that would make no difference to him if he saw another young face that pleased him. He is a consummate flirt, if no worse.

"I sincerely hope that nothing will happen to bring him here to Corsica; but if he does come, he will find that I am mistress of this castle, and that he cannot remain in it, unless with my permission."

CHAPTER XII.

CROMILLIAN, THE MORAL BANDIT.

WHEN Cromillian uttered his fervent invocation to his gun and then discharged both barrels into the air, he may have thought that his lieutenant, Paoli, would have signified his allegiance to the cause, and his endorsement of the sentiments expressed by a similar declaration, and an equally vociferous attestation, but if such a thought was in Cromillian's mind, he was destined to be disappointed. The lieutenant evinced no surprise at Cromillian's procedure and said nothing.

Cromillian's next speech was a marked drop to the commonplace:

"I wonder where Lulie is? She was to bring some food for us to this place. If she does not come, we shall have to share with the others. There is a savoury smell in the air, so I think we shall not go hungry."

Cromillian's favourite haunt in the ravine was only about five miles from Alfieri, but this fact was, of course, unknown to the villagers, who seldom came in that direction. A band of four shepherds, however, in search of some stray sheep, was unconsciously within a short distance of Cromillian's camp at the time he was waiting for the appearance of Lulie.

The search for the sheep was unsuccessful and the shepherds, inwardly cursing their luck, were on their way homeward.

"They are probably at the bottom of the river, or perhaps they have gone up the mountain," said one of the men.

"Perhaps," replied another; "but I am inclined to

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think that some of Cromillian's band came across them and we shall never see or hear of them again."

The second speaker was right. Three of the carcasses were hanging from the limb of a tree where Cromillian's band was encamped, while the other had given forth the savoury smell which had been noticed by Cromillian.

The second speaker went on: "Corsicans used to be considered brave men, but we might as well call ourselves cowards if we much longer allow this Cromillian and his band to lord it over us, and tell us what we shall do and what we shall not do."

"What has Cromillian done to you?" asked the first speaker. "Perhaps we have more reason to complain than you have. I do not think I am a coward, but when it comes to dealing with Cromillian, I think discretion is the better part of valour. But what has he done to you?"

"Nothing, yet," the other replied; "but I suppose my time will come. He knows I have some property and that when a man owes me money I follow it up until I get it. If a man has money or property, Cromillian seems to be his natural enemy. Why, it was only day before yesterday that old Lamont showed me a note he had received from Cromillian. It was short and to the point: 'Send the Widow Naflet a bag of flour and a quarter of beef.' This impudent piece of paper was signed 'Cromillian.'"

"What did old Lamont do?" asked the first speaker. "Did he tear the letter in pieces and tell Cromillian to go to the devil?"

"Hardly," was the reply. "He did not tell me what he did, but Jean said that within fifteen minutes after he got the letter, Lamont told him to take the flour and beef over to the widow as soon as possible."

The first speaker laughed: "Yes, and I think if you had received the letter you would have done just as

old Lamont did. I had the honour, about six months ago, to receive a note from Cromillian, commanding me to marry a certain girl who claimed that I had wronged her. Perhaps I had, but that was my business, was it not?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure it was," said the others. Then one of them asked: "But what did you do?"

"I married her," was the reply.

There was a general laugh, in which the speaker joined; then the third shepherd said:

"My experience with Cromillian was not a very pleasant one; in fact, I carried about with me, for fully a week, some very uncomfortable reminders. You see for nearly two hundred years there has been a vendetta between my family and that of the Bendelas. The Bendelas have all died out with the exception of the widow, whom you all know, and her little son, who is about ten years old, I think. Less than a month ago I happened to meet him and, having my sheep-staff with me, gave him a good pounding from which I did not suppose he could recover. I left him in the forest, feeling quite sure that he would die there, but as it so happened that rascal Cromillian found him, and the boy told him that I was the one who had struck him. Three days afterwards, as I was coming home from Ajaccio, one dark night, Cromillian and his gang captured me. They took me into the *maquis*, bound me to a tree, and Cromillian himself gave me thirty sturdy whacks upon the back. Then he dismissed me with the polite admonition that if I touched the boy again he would shoot me at sight."

"Have you met the boy since?" asked one of the shepherds.

"Oh, yes, often," was the reply. "About a week ago I called upon the Widow Bendela and told her that I would consider the vendetta closed and that she need have no fear for her boy in the future. He, on his

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part, promised that he would bear no ill-will against me or mine."

"You got off quite easily," said the fourth shepherd. "Do you see that?" As he spoke, he raised a matted shock of hair from the right side of his head, disclosing the fact that his right ear had been cut off.

"Why, how did that happen?" all three cried in unison.

"Well, you see," was the reply, "like my friend, I inherited a vendetta. One day I thought I had a remarkably good chance to bring down my enemy. I had come up behind him, and he had no idea of my presence. I am considered a good shot, but I missed it that time. Instead of hitting him in the back of the head, as I intended, the ball struck his right ear and lacerated it so that the greater part of it had to be removed by the surgeon. Somehow or other Cromillian got wind of the affair. Four of his band caught me one day and carried me into the *maquis*. Cromillian gave me a long lecture on the foolishness and criminality of the vendetta and then told me he would give me something to remember his words by; and he did, for one of the band took his stiletto and cut off my right ear. I have only one good ear now, but I have a good memory and I do not think I shall forget what Cromillian said on that occasion."

"Ha, who comes here?" cried one of the men. As he spoke a little girl, apparently about ten years of age, and bearing a basket which seemed to be heavily laden, approached them.

"Ah, my little girl," said one of them, "what's in your basket?" As he spoke he took it from her and tore off the cloth which covered it. "Cold tongue, venison, bread, butter, cake, chicken pie."

The shepherds gathered around the basket and looked upon its contents.

"A feast fit for an emperor," said one.

The little girl began to cry. "I'll tell uncle if you don't give me back my basket. He is waiting for me."

"Who is your uncle, little girl?" was the next question.

"Uncle Cromillian," said Lulie.

The four men started back, with frightened looks in their faces. "There, we're only fooling," said one of them. "See, we have not touched a thing. We were only in play, you know."

"Just in fun," said another. Here, take this," passing her a small coin.

"Uncle will not allow me to take money," said Lulie.

"Who has the care of you, little girl?" asked one of the men.

"Uncle Cromillian takes care of mother and me and little brother, since father died. He is not my uncle, but he says I may call him so if I want to, and so I do because he takes care of us."

"Say, friends," said the man with one ear, "you have heard of the old feud between the Batistellis and the Della Coscias. There will be blood shed in Alfieri before many days have passed. Let's find out by this little chick which way the wind blows."

"No, no, no," cried the others, "you must not question her. She will tell her uncle."

"Do you take me for a fool? No, there need be no questions, but, if the matter is talked about before her, do you see, I shall ask her to improvise for our amusement. No doubt she chants like a thrush and may hit the keynote for us. Come here, little girl. Now, I think you can chant a *ballata* for us, can you not?"

"I have but a poor gift, but if only Chennelly Baptiste were here she would charm you. She is called the very best *voceratrice* in the village. That is why she is sent for to attend all the funerals; she has the gift, you know."

"But surely you can give us a few lines about some-

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thing that has happened or that is going to happen. No doubt your mother has told you about the old corporals who lived hundreds of years ago and——”

Suddenly, the girl cried: “Oh, I have thought of something! Hark, now:

“The big oak has fallen by the frost and the snow, but its roots shot forth a branch and the branch has become an oak. He now rules his father’s house, the noble house of Della Coscia. There shall no evil come to him, for Heaven will protect him. The wicked Batistellis shall die if they bring any harm to Vandemar!”

“You have sung very prettily, my little girl,” said the shepherd who had asked her to improvise. “We are much obliged to you, but you had better go right along, for Uncle Cromillian is waiting for his dinner.”

The speaker looked after Lulie until she had disappeared from sight; then, turning to the others, he said:

“Ah! I thought so, but we shall see. If I mistake not, we are all partisans of the Batistellis, for surely it is to our interest to be on the side of the most powerful family in this part of Corsica. Now that Count Mont d’Oro is dead there is no one to dispute Pascal Batistelli’s authority in Alfieri.”

“You forget Cromillian,” said one of the shepherds.

“I think that Pascal Batistelli is a match for Cromillian,” was the reply. “If Vandemar Della Coscia dares to set foot in Corsica again, Pascal Batistelli will have his life before Uncle Cromillian has time to interfere. Then we shall all have the laugh on Uncle Cromillian.”

It was fully a fortnight after the departure of Countess Mont d’Oro and Bertha from Paris, that Clarence Glynn received a letter announcing their safe arrival in Corsica. It was written by Bertha and he read it with great interest:

"MY DEAR KIND FRIENDS, CLARENCE AND JENNIE:

"It is with a heart overflowing with gratitude that I address you thus, for I seem almost lost in this great world. I have been here only a few days, but have learned in that time that this is a very strange country. Hate, instead of love, seems to be the ruling passion among Corsicans. Countess Mont d'Oro hates her own son, and, so far as I can learn, everybody hates somebody else. But perhaps I ought not to criticise them too severely. Have you had any word from Mr. De Vinne, or from my guardian, your father? I know that you will send me information regarding them as soon as possible, but the suspense in which I live from day to day is dreadful.

"The Mont d'Oro estate is beautiful in so far as nature can make it so, and the one that adjoins it, owned by the Batistelli family, is even more lovely. As the story goes, about seventeen years ago, the father, Conrad Batistelli, was assassinated by a man named Manuel Della Coscia. The same day that he was killed his daughter Vivienne was born. When the mother learned of the death of her husband, she became insane and died in that condition, leaving the little girl fatherless and motherless. Everybody calls Manuel Della Coscia a coward for, immediately after killing Conrad Batistelli, he left the island secretly, taking with him his little son Vandemar, who was about six years of age at the time, and they have not been heard from since. Every true-hearted Corsican execrates the name of Della Coscia, for in Corsica when a man kills his enemy he is supposed to be brave enough to remain and give the friends of his enemy a chance to kill him. There is a rumour that Vandemar Della Coscia is soon to return to Corsica, and Countess Mont d'Oro tells me that the Batistelli brothers will kill him at sight if he dares to come. I am not acquainted with the Batistellis, nor do I wish to become so, with the prospect of such a

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terrible event as the assassination of this young man at their hands.

"The Countess tells me that her husband and Pascal Batistelli were very anxious that her son, Count Napier, should wed Vivienne Batistelli; and, according to the custom of the country, they arranged a betrothal, irrespective of the wishes of the young people. The Countess says that Vivienne came to her one day and told her that under no circumstances could she ever marry her son, and it was solely for that reason the Countess induced Count Napier to accompany her to Paris, where, as you know, he is living a wild life. He still considers himself betrothed to Vivienne, but the Countess hopes that he will forget her and not come back to Corsica again.

"With love to you both, I am yours, with great affection,

"BERTHA RENVILLE."



CHAPTER XIII.

“ TO SEE IS TO LOVE! ”

THE post-chaises which conveyed Count Mont d'Oro and Thomas Glynné reached Marseilles two days sooner than did the slow-moving vehicle in which Jack De Vinne was a passenger. The Count and his companion were again fortunate in finding a vessel just ready to sail for Ajaccio, while Jack was detained two days after his arrival before he could find a vessel bound for the desired port. For these reasons, the Count and Thomas Glynné reached Corsica some five days sooner than did Jack.

Before their arrival the Count had decided that he would not take his companion to the hotel in Ajaccio. He was so well known in the town that he knew the presence of his foreign-looking companion would be sure to cause comment. Again, what one person in Ajaccio knew, soon everybody knew, and he did not care to have the news of his arrival reach his mother until he was able to present himself in person.

He was acquainted with a Corsican named Savoni, who lived upon a side street quite a distance from the centre of the town. Savoni was a widower with one daughter. His wife had been the victim of a vendetta, and the daughter had come near meeting the same fate as her mother. She had received a severe blow upon the head from which she had never fully recovered. She was able, however, to attend to her household duties and had the reputation of being one of the best cooks in Corsica. Count Mont d'Oro's life in Paris had made him a *bon vivant*, and he knew by experience that, al-

though the beds in the hotel at Ajaccio were clean and comfortable, the fare was not of a high order of excellence. It was, therefore, to Savoni's house that he took Thomas Glynne and made arrangements for him to remain there until he should send for him to come to Mont d'Oro Castle.

The second day after his arrival in Corsica, the Count suddenly made his appearance at the home of his mother, to her great astonishment and to the dismay of Bertha Renville. The mother uttered no word of welcome. Her first inquiry was: "What brought you down here without an invitation?"

"I came as most travellers do," was the reply, "by post-chaise from Paris to Marseilles, by sailing vessel from Marseilles to Ajaccio, and, to show that I am still an able-bodied young man, I came from that town on foot. I am, naturally, somewhat tired and deucedly hungry, and so, if you have no objection, my good mother, I will go down and get a lunch."

Suiting the action to the word, he bowed to the ladies, who had not yet recovered from their astonishment, and withdrew. For several minutes after the Count's departure, the ladies said nothing. Then the Countess spoke:

"He won't tell me what he came for, so I shall have to find it out myself. Have you formed any opinion?" she asked, turning to Bertha.

"Why, certainly not," said the young girl. "But from what you have told me, I should naturally say that he came to see his mother."

"As you know that is not the case," and there was a bitter smile upon the face of the Countess, "it must be that he came to see somebody else."

Bertha may have divined the Countess's meaning, but she did not propose to acknowledge it, so she said:

"Such being the case, his object is probably to see Mademoiselle Batistelli, to whom he is betrothed."

"Perhaps so," was the reply, "but we shall see," and, by mutual consent, the subject was dropped.

As the vessel upon which Jack De Vinne was a passenger was approaching the quay, the young man caught sight of Mr. Thomas Glynne. His personal appearance, despite the false beard, was not materially changed, and he recognised him easily.

"Will he know me?" was Jack's first thought.

Before leaving Paris he had procured a pair of spectacles of coloured glass to wear during the trip from Marseilles to Ajaccio, to shade his eyes from the glare of the sun on the water. He resolved to keep them on as a measure of disguise. He brought his portmanteau from his cabin, but delayed his departure from the vessel until he saw Mr. Glynne turn and walk leisurely towards the town; then Jack landed, keeping some distance behind him. Jack was debating in his mind whether he should go directly to the hotel, even if Mr. Glynne was also a guest there, when he saw the latter turn down a side street.

When Jack reached the hotel, he decided that he would still further conceal his identity by giving an assumed name. His command of the French language was so good that he felt he could easily pass for a native-born Frenchman, so, for the nonce, Jack De Vinne became Andrea Fortier.

The dinner was simple but substantial, and after it was over Jack went to his room to decide upon his future course of action. It filled him with happiness when he reflected that he could not be very far from Bertha Renville. If it had not been for the presence of her guardian he would have at once made inquiries as to where Countess Mont d'Oro lived, and have gone to the house; but the fact that Mr. Glynne was in Corsica showed that he must proceed cautiously in taking the next step. Glynne had no doubt learned that his

niece was in Corsica, and was there upon the same errand as himself. In the afternoon the sky grew overcast, and soon a heavy rain-storm set in; Jack decided that he would postpone making any inquiries until the following morning.

When the bright sun heralded the advent of a new day, it not only gave a warm glow to the face of nature, but lighted up a scene of unwonted activity in the harbour. Riding therein was a great vessel, one of Old England's invincible frigates, the port-holes indicating that it carried an armament of fully sixty guns, while the floating pennant showed that no less a personage than a British admiral was on board. The vessel was the *Osprey*, commanded by Admiral Sir Gilbert Enright. Acting under orders from the Admiralty, he had been visiting certain stations in the Mediterranean, Ajaccio being on his list.

The Admiral was accompanied by his only daughter, Helen. Before the departure of the *Osprey* from England, Miss Enright was convalescent after a severe illness. The Admiral had desired that some one else should be placed in command of the *Osprey*, as he did not wish to leave his daughter, whose health was not fully restored. To his great delight, one of the Admiralty, who was a personal friend, suggested that nothing would do Miss Enright so much good as a sea voyage, and, at his suggestion, permission was given by the Admiralty for the Admiral's daughter to accompany him on the voyage.

Miss Enright was nearly thirty years of age, tall, thin, sallow, and with but few claims to personal beauty. She was a character, in a way. From her earliest years, Helen Enright had been a student. She loved to learn, and learned to love learning for its own sake. There were no colleges for women in those days, but her father was wealthy and she had been supplied with competent tutors in every line of study that she

chose to undertake. She had a passion for mathematics. Her literary recreation was history, and there were few women of her age in England who could solve knotty mathematical problems or pass so severe an examination as she could have done in the history of England and the Continental countries.

The voyage had restored her strength, and she had evinced a desire to become acquainted with the technical details of the vessel which her father commanded, and with the principles of navigation. Her father's duties were such that he could not devote the required time necessary to give her the desired instruction, so, at her suggestion, for her father usually allowed her to have her own way in everything, one of the officers was detailed to act as her tutor in seamanship. That officer was Lieutenant Victor Duquesne.

Miss Helen, of course, had met him before at the Naval Academy and at her father's house, and was much pleased at his selection, for he had impressed her as being very handsome, very polite, and very dignified, and although she did not, as a rule, care much for the society of young men, on one occasion she found herself lamenting the fact that he was so young. Victor was but twenty-three. Perhaps the cause of her lamentation was the knowledge that she was seven years older than he, which, to her eminently practical mind, was an insuperable obstacle to an intimacy extending beyond the limits of—friendship.

It was late that morning when Jack arose and gazed out of his window and found that the quay was crowded with the inhabitants of Ajaccio. Jack's first inclination was to join them. Then he reflected that Mr. Glynne would undoubtedly be there, and he wished to avoid all possibility of recognition until he had seen Bertha. He decided, therefore, to go downstairs and see if he could learn anything about the new arrival and the reason for the appearance of that formidable warship at that

port. He found the landlord in a state of pleasurable excitement.

"What vessel is that in the bay?" inquired Jack.

"That," answered the landlord, "is the British ship *Osprey*, commanded by Admiral Enright, and I have been notified that the Admiral, with his daughter and one officer, will dine at the hotel and possibly pass the night here."

"The *Osprey*! Admiral Enright!" exclaimed Jack, excitedly. "Why, that is Victor's ship. How fortunate!"

"What's that?" inquired the landlord.

"Nothing," answered Jack, abruptly. "I was only saying that I think I know one of the officers. What a dunce!" he commented to himself as he walked away, "but then I have been through so much since I parted from Victor, and then to think that my quest of Bertha should bring us both together again in this town! How strange! What a mighty little world this is, after all."

He could scarcely contain himself, yet he felt that the only plan for him would be to await the arrival of the ship's officers and ascertain if Victor was aboard. He did not wish to run the risk of meeting Mr. Glynn, so he returned to his room and passed the time in gazing out of the window toward the harbour, and in watching the crowd of people passing to and fro.

Towards noon a boat put off from the warship. Jack eagerly watched the craft as it neared the shore and was lost to his sight. Shortly, the crowd parted and three people were seen coming up the quay. One was a stout gentleman with a very florid face, wearing the undress uniform of a British admiral, while upon one side of him was a young lady, and on the other side was—yes—Victor!

Jack grabbed his hat and ran downstairs, but as he reached the veranda he suddenly, with great restraint, subdued his intense excitement, and as the three vis-

itors approached, Jack stood quietly by the entrance of the hotel, hoping thus to accentuate Victor's surprise, and at the same time conjuring up in his own mind the effect the meeting would have on his bosom friend. They had just reached the steps when Victor happened to look up and straight into the eyes of Jack!

Victor recoiled, as from a shock, gave another earnest look, then, neglecting all formalities, darted forward with both hands extended. "Jack!" he exclaimed.

"Old fellow," cried Jack, "this is a pleasure."

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Victor, totally at a loss what else to say, while in his intense gaze was a veritable compound of inquiry, surprise, and delight. At once recollecting himself, he placed his hand on Jack's shoulder and turned to Admiral Enright. "Admiral Enright, permit me the honour of presenting to you my very closest friend, Mr. John De Vinne."

"Mr. De Vinne, I am most happy to make your acquaintance," said the Admiral, grasping Jack warmly by the hand. Then turning to his daughter, he said: "Mr. De Vinne, permit me to present you to my daughter, Miss Helen."

Miss Enright graciously acknowledged the introduction.

The landlord now appeared and escorted the quartet to the hotel parlour, much to the chagrin of the curious crowd that had gathered outside the door.

After a few generalities had been indulged in, dinner was announced. To Jack was accorded the pleasant duty of escorting Miss Enright to dinner. The Admiral occupied the post of honour at the head of the table, with Victor on his left.

After the conclusion of the meal the Admiral's daughter excused herself as she wished to rest for a while, and the Admiral also repaired to his room to attend to matters in connection with his visit. This left the young men to their own devices.

"Come right up to my room, Vic," exclaimed Jack.

Slamming the door behind them, he threw his hat on the bed and motioned Victor to a seat and said: "Now, old boy, I have got you all to myself. How is it the fates have thrown us together?"

"You are the one to explain," said Victor. "I am here in obedience to my father's request, as you well know, but when I last saw you, you had as much idea of coming to Ajaccio as you had of visiting Hades."

"Yes, I know," exclaimed Jack. "You are right, but much has happened since we parted, which you should understand. I am now heir to the Earldom of Noxton." He then, at length, made Victor acquainted with the death and burial of his brother, the escape of Bertha from her guardian and her flight to Corsica. "I arrived here but yesterday," he concluded, "and tomorrow I shall search her out. Your father lives here, I believe," he said.

"I don't know," answered Victor. "When I arrived at Malta I received a letter from my father forwarded to me from the Admiralty, which requested me to announce my arrival here in a note which I was to address to one Cromillian, my father saying that this man Cromillian was a friend of his and would see that the message reached him. I am in a quandary as to just what to do. I must leave early in the morning, commissioned by the Admiral to present a letter of introduction to Monsieur Batistelli. This will take a couple of days, for which I am very sorry, as I should like to send this letter to Cromillian at the earliest possible moment."

"I'll tell you," said Jack. "You write the letter, Vic, and I will undertake to deliver it in the morning, and at the same time, possibly, I can secure information as to the whereabouts of Countess Mont d'Oro and, consequently, Bertha."

"And will you do this?" cried Lieutenant Duquesne.

"What the ancient Pylades did for the ancient Orestes the modern Pylades will do for you," answered Jack warmly.

"Thank you, my dear friend," cried Lieutenant Duquesne, as he grasped Jack by the hand, "I can think of no service which would be more highly appreciated by me."

The two friends, as may be imagined, found plenty of topics on which to converse, and before they parted that night Lieutenant Duquesne wrote his note and placed it in an envelope with the name Cromillan on the outside. "I have more time now," he said, "than I shall have in the morning."

They then bade each other good-night and Victor went to his room.

Jack was greatly excited by the course of events and sat down by the window. It was a bright, moonlight night. He felt that he must do something to quiet his mental agitation. He put on his hat and walked out of the hotel, scarcely noticing what course he was taking. He walked on until he found himself upon the quay. The great hull of the *Osprey* loomed up before him, the bright rays of the moon lighting up the vessel as if it were noonday.

He glanced downward and saw his full-length shadow projected upon the rough planks of the quay. The thought came to him that he did not wish to stand out in such bold relief, and he quickly sought a part of the quay where the shadows were almost impenetrable.

Hardly had he done so, when he heard the plashing of oars. In a moment, he saw a boat containing two men approaching the quay. When they reached the wharf, they stood for several minutes without speaking, but looking intently at the British frigate. Jack was not more than ten feet from them and, when they did speak, every word uttered was overheard by him.

"Just like those Englishmen," one of them said. "If

they know anything, they won't tell you, and if they don't, they can't tell you, so you learn nothing either way. I did my best to find out from that sentry whether Lieutenant Duquesne was on board, but not a word could I get out of him; only to come to-morrow, between eleven and twelve. But we can't go to-morrow, for Cromillian told me that he had some important work on hand which would take us away to the south for a week."

"I don't see that we can do any more," said the other man, "except to tell him that we can't find out anything. He is a just man, is Cromillian, and he won't blame us if we have done all that we can do."

"I would go up to the hotel," said the first speaker, "and see if this Lieutenant is there, but the landlord knows me, and so do all the servants, and, if I ask for the Lieutenant, they would immediately surmise that he was connected in some way with Cromillian, and the Captain, you know, cautioned us both to do nothing that would show that he knew the Lieutenant or anything about him."

Jack waited to hear no more. The Fates had been kind. Here was his opportunity. Without stopping to think how reckless his conduct was, he stepped forward from his dark retreat and placed a hand on each of the speakers. Quick as lightning, they stepped back and pulling out their stiletos, stood facing him. Then Jack realised his narrow escape, for a Corsican usually strikes first and asks for explanations afterwards.

"Put up your weapons," he said, in the mildest tone he could assume, although his voice was agitated. "I overheard what you said, but I am a friend."

"You will have to prove that before we believe it," said one of the men, and they still held their stiletos in position for ready use.

"I am a friend of Lieutenant Duquesne, the man

whom you seek, and also have a letter from him which he has asked me to take to the man whose name is Cromillian. Here, look at this and you will see that I have spoken the truth."

He took the letter from his pocket and showed it to the men.

"Is that all right?" asked one of the men, turning to the other. "You know I cannot read."

The second man took the letter and scanned it closely, "Yes," he said, "that's the name on the letter—Cromillian. What do you want us to do? To take the letter to Cromillian?"

"No," said Jack, "I gave my word to Lieutenant Duquesne that I would deliver it to Cromillian myself. What better proof can you have of my good faith than my willingness to go with you?"

"That's so," said one of the men, and the other one nodded his assent. They sheathed their stiletos.

"When can you go?" asked one of them.

"At once," replied Jack.

"Come along then," was the command. "Are you good for a six-mile tramp over a rough road?"

"I have walked a much longer distance than that over worse roads than I have seen here," was Jack's reply.

"Come along then," said one of the men. "Here, take your letter."

Jack put it in his coat pocket and prepared to follow the men, but they had their ideas as to the precise manner in which the journey should be performed. Each of the men took one of Jack's arms within his own, and thus, half captive and half supported, Jack began his march.

As they walked on, he felt somewhat elated at the course which events had taken, but his feelings of satisfaction would have given place to others of a different nature if he could have looked behind him and seen the

figure which came stealthily forward from out a shadow as dense as that which had enfolded Jack, and not more than twenty feet from where the latter had stood.

Thomas Glynne kept the trio in sight. They were not likely to look back unless he approached them too closely, and it was easy for him to look forward.

"I never should have known him," said Glynne to himself. "He seems changed somehow, but when he spoke I recognised his voice at once. My young man, I do not know what you are up to and the man they call Cromillian, but you evidently do not know what you are up to any more than I do. It is a good maxim, when you find a trail to follow it and trust to luck for the result. I shall probably get back to town before the Count sends for me to go to the house. I am sure he is a rascal at heart; but, if I can't keep her from marrying Mr. Jack De Vinne I'll know the reason why."

The next morning, Lieutenant Duquesne went to Jack's room and knocked. There being no response to repeated summonses of like nature, he tried the latch, and the door yielded. He looked in, and started back in astonishment. The bed had not been slept in, yet there was evidence that the occupant intended to return, for his portmanteau was open and several articles which he had taken from it were upon the table. Lieutenant Duquesne was much excited on making this discovery. He at once sought the landlord:

"Did my friend, Mr. Fortier, tell you last night, before he went out, that he was to be gone for any length of time?"

"Gone?" queried the publican. "Has he gone?"

"I do not know where he has gone or how long he intends to stay," said the Lieutenant, a little nettled, "but he did not sleep in his room last night, which looks as though he intended to return."

"Well," said the landlord, "the room is his for a week, and he can come back when he gets ready. He

paid me in advance. If he doesn't come back when his time is up, I shall lock up his effects and charge him for storage until I get my money," said the landlord.

"No doubt but you will do that," said the Lieutenant, "but I am a little anxious to know what has become of him. Do you know when he went out? I hope no harm has come to him."

"I went to bed early last night," said the landlord, "but I will ask some of the servants."

Inquiry failed to find any one who had seen Mr. Fortier leave the hotel, and Lieutenant Duquesne was obliged to content himself with the reflection that possibly the young man had started at once to perform the mission which he had intrusted to him. Once more, he went in search of the landlord:

"If my friend, Mr. Fortier, doesn't come back at the end of the week, I wish you to lock the door, leaving the articles therein just where he left them. I will be responsible for the rent of the room, at least until our vessel sails."

"It doesn't make any difference who pays the bills, so long as I get my money," said the landlord.

Lieutenant Duquesne ascertained the shortest road which would lead him to the Batistelli castle, and, having secured a saddle-horse, started to perform the mission which Admiral Enright had intrusted to him—the presentation of a letter of introduction which he bore from Lord Colton, the Admiral's cousin.

Pascal Batistelli received the young man graciously. The head of the house of Batistelli was a man about forty years of age, with a naturally constrained expression and a forbidding manner; but he was well versed in the requirements of polite society, and he probably remembered that, when he had visited London, many years before, in search of Manuel Della Coscia and his son, soon after the death of his father, he had received many attentions and much assistance

from Lord Colton, to whom he had been introduced by the French ambassador. The time had now come for him to reciprocate the courtesy, and he assured Lieutenant Duquesne that it would give him great pleasure to receive Admiral Enright and his daughter as his guests, and he added, as the thought came to him that this young man might be a suitor, or possibly the accepted lover, of the Admiral's daughter:

"It would give me additional pleasure, my dear Lieutenant, if you, also, would accept the hospitality of my house."

The Lieutenant thanked him and said that, if it was the Admiral's wish and that of his daughter, he would be pleased to accept. The two gentlemen parted with mutual expressions of esteem and regard, although their acquaintance had been of very short duration, but such expressions are a part of the social code, and may mean more or less, as the case may be.

As the Lieutenant left the house, he stopped to survey the magnificent grounds which surrounded the mansion. As he walked slowly towards the gate, outside of which he had tied his horse, his ear caught the sound of running water. He paused at the entrance of a path which led through a grove of trees with overhanging, interlaced branches, forming a cool retreat. He entered, and, as he advanced, the sound grew louder and louder. At the end of the path he came to a sudden stop, gazing with admiration at the picture before him.

The sound of running water had come from a little brook which, at the end of the path, fell over a rocky ledge some six feet high, forming a small waterfall. The bright rays of the sun fell upon the drops of water as they descended, giving them the appearance of a shower of diamonds. But it was not this natural beauty by which the young man's gaze was transfixed. Kneeling at the foot of the waterfall, a basket of freshly

plucked flowers beside her, was the most beautiful girl whom he had ever seen. Her hair and eyes were black, while her skin had that peculiar tint found only among the women of the southern nations of Europe. She was young, not more than eighteen, and, as she knelt beside the brook, dipping first one hand and then the other in the water, and sprinkling the flowers, she formed a picture of beauty and grace sure to appeal to an impressionable young man like Lieutenant Victor Duquesne. She had not heard the young man approach, and kept on with her task, unmindful of his presence.

Her heart must have been full of happiness that morning, for she began to sing, and the Lieutenant was sure that he had never heard a voice of such purity and sweetness. He did not know what to do next, so he simply stood still gazing with unfeigned pleasure upon the lovely girl before him. Suddenly she looked up and their eyes met. She started to her feet, with a slight cry, and then the rich blood mounted to her cheeks, tinging them a deep red. She did not speak but her eyes asked the question, plainly:

“Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Lieutenant Duquesne divined their meaning and, bowing low, said: “I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, but I have just come from Monsieur Pascal Batistelli, whom I visited with a message from my superior officer, when I heard the sound of running water and, unconscious that I was guilty of an impropriety, I came down this path to learn the cause.”

“And you have seen my brother?” the young girl asked.

“I have seen Monsieur Pascal Batistelli,” was the reply. “Are you a daughter of the house?”

The young girl dropped the large black eyes which, up to this time, had looked frankly into his.

“I am the only daughter,” she said. “I am Vivi-

enne Batistelli. I have two brothers, Pascal and Julien, but Julien is not at home. He went away yesterday and has not come back."

"I regret that I did not meet him," said the Lieutenant, politely, "but I trust that I may yet have that pleasure. Those are beautiful flowers which you have gathered, and the pure water that you have sprinkled upon them has given them an added loveliness. May I ask a favour?"

The young girl looked up and smiled. "If not too great a one," she said.

"To grant it," and the young man bowed low, "will rob you of but one of those beautiful flowers. I should like to take it with me as a souvenir of this unexpected but very pleasant meeting."

"I surely shall not feel the loss of one little flower," said she, as she took a white rose from the basket, "and I am pleased to give it to you if it will afford you as much pleasure as you say it will."

He took the flower.

"Pardon, monsieur, but I must return to the house, or my flowers will wilt in the hot sun despite the cool bath which I have given them."

Lieutenant Duquesne stepped to one side, thinking that she would go by way of the path and would have to pass him, but she turned in an opposite direction and quickly disappeared from sight. The Lieutenant left the path and, reaching the brook, stood upon the same place where she had knelt. As he did so, he saw her slight form disappear beneath a vine-covered arbour a short distance away. A thought came into his mind and, unconsciously, found expression in words:

"She is beautiful," and he started at the sound of his own voice; "she is the most beautiful girl I ever saw. To see her is to love her!"

He retraced his steps and entered the path again

when, to his surprise, he came face to face with a young man of about his own age, dressed in the height of Parisian fashion, who stood regarding him with an angry frown upon his face.

It was the young Count Napier Mont d'Oro.



CHAPTER XIV.

A FLOWER WITH BLOOD-STAINED PETALS.

BERTHA RENVILLE was seated alone in the beautiful boudoir of Countess Mont d'Oro. She had just received a long and interesting letter from Mrs. Clarence Glynne, the concluding paragraph of which read:

"My husband has almost entirely recovered from his severe illness. Mr. Jack De Vinne wrote us a short note, merely to say that he would start for Corsica immediately and we have not heard from him since. He informed us that he had called at Countess Mont d'Oro's residence in Paris, but learned that you and the Countess had left for some place unknown. As for Mr. Glynne, your guardian, he left here at the time Clarence was taken ill to search for you and bring you back. Clarence thinks he went to Paris and finding you had accompanied the Countess Mont d'Oro to Corsica, that his father will undoubtedly continue his quest to that place. He says his father is a very determined man, is very angry at your disappearance, and will certainly follow you if he can learn where you have gone.

"Yours very devotedly,

"JENNIE GLYNNE.

"P. S.—I think Mr. De Vinne knows where you are, but thought it best for us not to know."

Count Napier Mont d'Oro's experience had not been very pleasant before his meeting with Lieutenant Duquesne. Learning from one of the servants that his

mother had gone to pay a visit to a tenant who was ill, he made his way at once to her boudoir. Upon entering he found Bertha seated, gazing abstractedly at the letter which she had just finished reading.

"Ah! My good mother is not here. I wished to speak to her. I suppose she will return soon. Pardon me, if I wait," and he sank into a chair. "This is a beautiful morning, is it not, mademoiselle? And how do you like Corsica?"

"I have seen very little of it," was the reply. "I have not been out of the house since my arrival, except to take a walk in the grounds."

"Ah! That is a shame!" cried the Count, sympathetically. "Will you not go driving with me this morning? Our scenery is beautiful because it is so natural. The hand of art has not tampered with it as it has in France."

"You are very kind, Count Mont d'Oro," Bertha replied, "but your mother said she would order the carriage this afternoon."

"Ah, yes," said the Count. "I know she is afraid of a spirited horse, and old Pierre will drive you, with a pair of horses almost as old as he is. I have a high-stepper in the stables, a spirited beast that curvets, prances, and amuses you with his antics."

"I think," replied Bertha, "for carriage driving I should prefer the quieter animals. I am not afraid when I am on horseback, but really I must decline your invitation. There are reasons——" She hesitated.

The Count drew his chair closer to her.

"And what are the reasons, do you suppose, that have caused me to give up my pleasant life in Paris and come down here to this humdrum place?"

Bertha felt piqued by his persistency. "To see your lady-love, I suppose," she said.

"To see a lady-love, yes. Do you know her name?"

"Mademoiselle Vivienne Batistelli, I presume," replied Bertha, with a tone of restraint in her voice.

The Count laughed. "She is one of them. I suppose you may have heard that she is my prospective bride. But a Corsican falls in love many times before he weds."

"I am not used to the ways of your country," said Bertha, "and, for that reason, I cannot fully appreciate what you have just said."

"But I know a great deal about your country," rejoined the Count. "I had the pleasure of coming from Marseilles to Ajaccio on the same vessel with a true friend of yours."

Bertha started and her cheeks flushed. Whom could he mean but Jack? He was only teasing her after all. She must be more gracious. She turned a smiling face towards the Count and said:

"I have so few friends in Corsica I should be pleased to learn that I have one more. When may I expect to see him?"

"Well," replied the Count, "he is not coming here until I tell him that you are ready to receive him. He has promised to be guided by me in the matter."

"That is strange. I do not understand you."

"Well, you will when I tell you who he is."

Bertha was in a quandary. What could it mean? Who would make a promise to Count Mont d'Oro that he would not come to see her except with the Count's permission? It must be Jack—and yet, she hesitated to mention his name.

The Count thought the time had come to relieve her suspense.

"My companion," he said, "was your guardian, Mr. Thomas Glynne."

Bertha started to her feet. The smile faded from her face and a look of apprehension, almost terror, succeeded it.

"But you will not tell him where I am?" she cried, appealingly.

"Oh, he knows where you are," replied the Count, "but I imagined from what I heard that you were not very desirous of seeing him, so I made him promise that he would not come here until I told him he might."

"That was very good of you, Count. I do not wish to see him. You will do all you can to keep him away from here, won't you?"

"Well, that depends," said the Count. "I do not think I should enjoy your society if he were here, and, if there is any prospect of our passing some pleasant days together, you may be sure that he will not hear from me while they last."

Bertha divined his purpose and her proud spirit rebelled at the virtual threat. So this young man proposed to force himself upon her and to oblige her to endure his society. If she did not comply, then he intended to send for her guardian. Whatever slight feeling of respect she may have had for him vanished at once. No wonder that his mother hated him. What a mean-spirited young man he was! But what could she do? Then the thought came to her that Jack was coming to Corsica. Perhaps he had already arrived and would soon be there to protect her. She turned to the Count.

"It makes little difference to me, Count Mont d'Oro," she said, "whether my guardian comes here or not. I have other friends upon whose protection I can rely."

"I know whom you mean," said the Count, "but he will not come. You are thinking of Monsieur De Vinne. Your guardian expected to break the sad news to you himself, but as he is not here I will tell you what he told me. Your young friend, Monsieur De Vinne, was, unfortunately, killed in a fight which took place between a Frenchman and an Englishman."

There was a look of scorn upon Bertha's face and a withering tone of disdain in her voice when she spoke. "Count Mont d'Oro, what you have just told me is a falsehood. I know that it is not true. I have a letter from Mrs. Glynne in which she tells me that Mr. De Vinne expressed his intention of starting for Corsica at once. If he has not already arrived, he will be here very soon. I do not understand what your motive has been in telling me such untruths. I do not believe that my guardian is here or that he has made you any such promise as you say he has. While I remain in your mother's care, which I trust will not be for long, I will try to be civil to you, but I do not care to have any further conversation with you upon any subject whatever."

As she uttered the last words the door opened and Countess Mont d'Oro entered. She took in the situation at a glance. Her son, as usual, was making himself disagreeable. She had heard Bertha's closing words and her womanly intuition supplied the rest of the story.

"Napier," she said, "your presence here, as I have told you many times, is unwelcome to me, and I know that it must be to Mademoiselle Renville, from what I have just heard. If you insist upon remaining, it must be in your own apartments. I will see that your meals are sent to you. Come, mademoiselle."

She took Bertha's arm and the two women left the room.

The Count stepped out upon the terrace. The hunt was up. He had been beaten at his own game. What a fool he had been to say anything about De Vinne. He had gone too far, had said too much, and had lost all. Well, there were plenty of pretty women in the world, but this fair, young Miss Renville was so different from the others. The case was not hopeless, after all. De Vinne had not arrived, and the guardian had

He would see the guardian and put him on the watch. Some plan could be formed, no doubt, by which the lovers could be kept apart.

He descended the long flight of steps and walked towards the gateway. A horse was fastened to a tree just outside. To whom could it belong? Perhaps young De Vinne had arrived, his mother knew it, and had taken Mademoiselle Renville to meet him. Hearing voices, he glanced down a wooded path and saw a young man in naval uniform, and—he was speaking to a young lady. Who could it be? A few quick strides down the path and he saw that it was Vivienne Batistelli.

Now, Count Mont d'Oro knew in his heart that he did not really love Vivienne, but the mutual wish of his father and her brother had been carried out so far as he was able, and he reasoned that she had no right to love anybody else and no one else had any right to love her. Victor's words—"To see her is to love her"—rang in his ears. Had matters, then, gone so far as that? A moment later the two young men stood face to face.

"What right have you to that flower?" demanded the Count, his voice choked with passion.

"The right of possession," said Victor, quietly; "but what right have you to ask such a question?"

"I am Count Napier Mont d'Oro, of Alfieri," was the reply.

"Such extreme confidence merits reciprocity," said Victor. "I am Lieutenant Victor Duquesne of His Britannic Majesty's ship *Osprey*, now lying at anchor in the harbour of Ajaccio."

"Where did you get that flower?" cried the Count, at the top of his voice, his feelings evidently becoming ungovernable.

"It was given to me by a young lady. She said her name was Vivienne Batistelli."

"Do you know who she is?"

"I only know," said Victor, "that she is beautiful in person and charming in her manners. I may have been presumptuous in asking for the flower, but she certainly excused it or she would not have given it to me. Are you well acquainted with her?" and Victor calmly regarded the angry face of the Count.

"She is to be the future Countess Mont d'Oro," was the reply. "She is betrothed to me and has no right to give flowers or any other token to an absolute stranger. Give me that flower."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Victor. "If the young lady who was so kind as to bestow it upon me asks for its return, I will give it to her, but nothing shall force me to give it to you."

"We will see about that," cried the Count, and before Victor had divined his intention, the enraged man drew his stiletto and made a thrust at him. Victor threw up his left hand to ward off the thrust, receiving a severe cut which bled freely.

Physically, Victor was much more than a match for the Count. Grasping the latter's wrist, he bent his right hand backward until the fingers loosed their hold upon the stiletto and it fell to the ground. Victor gave the weapon a vigorous kick, and it disappeared from sight in a clump of bushes. He next gave the Count a push backward, crying as he did so:

"Now, let me pass!"

But the Count had reached that stage where ungovernable fury takes the place of reason. He aimed a blow with his fist at Victor, which the latter parried, while with his right hand, which was tightly clenched, he struck the Count fairly between the eyes and felled him to the ground.

In the struggle the white rose, which had been the cause of contention, had fallen upon the ground. Victor picked it up, and as he did so he noticed that its former white petals were now blood-stained. Her flower

and his blood! He unbuttoned his coat, placed the rose over his heart, and then buttoned the garment again.

Casting a contemptuous look at his late antagonist, who seemed to be recovering consciousness, he retraced his steps through the wooded path, vaulted over the low gate, mounted his horse, and rode at a rapid rate towards Ajaccio.



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CHAPTER XV.

A DUEL IN THE DARK.

VICTOR's horse was in a decidedly jaded condition when he reached the hotel at Ajaccio. The young Lieutenant at once sought an interview with the Admiral and his daughter, and conveyed to them, in language as nearly approaching that used by Pascal Batistelli as he could remember, the latter's courteous invitation for them to become his guests at Batistelli Castle.

"You call it a castle," said Miss Helen. "Does it resemble those of mediæval times, with the moat about it, and a drawbridge and porteullis? How decidedly romantic that will be. I shall have to send an account of it to one of the London papers."

"To speak honestly, Miss Enright," said Victor, "I am little acquainted with the construction of mediæval castles. I have learned more from your short description than I ever knew before."

"I shall be pleased to enlighten you further," said Miss Enright. "The moat was a deep ditch filled with water which surrounded the castle and rendered it inaccessible. The drawbridge was what its name indicates, and was let down across the moat in order that those who lived in the castle could reach the mainland, or return."

"Ah! I see," said Victor, "without wetting their feet."

"Your remark, Lieutenant Duquesne," said Miss Enright, with a frown which added to the classic severity of her features, "is entirely irrelevant. Do you wish me to proceed, or shall we stop at the drawbridge?"

"By no means, Miss Enright. Do not leave us upon the drawbridge or we may fall into the hands of the enemy, and I do not care to become a prisoner."

"They did not take prisoners in those days," said Miss Enright. "Dead enemies cost nothing for the keeping. Besides, what they had on them became lawful booty. They had not learned in those days our expensive manner of carrying on warfare."

"Then so much the more reason," said Victor, "why you should point out some means of escape from that drawbridge."

"Then," said Miss Enright, "come within the castle and we will let the portcullis fall. Allow me to explain that the portcullis was a heavy wooden gate or door, made of double timbers securely bolted together. It was impervious to culverins, and it took a ponderous stone from a catapult to shatter it."

"Thank you, Miss Enright," said Victor. "Now that we are within the castle, with the drawbridge up and the portcullis down, I beg you to let them remain where they are."

"Your experiences this morning, Lieutenant Duquesne, have made you flippant, and you know I have told you many times that I cannot endure useless levity in a man—especially a young one. So with your kind permission, and that of my honoured father, I will retire to my own room."

"Yes, go, Helen," said the Admiral, "and I will give him a good talking to when you are gone. I am half inclined to cashier him and dismiss him from the service."

"Oh, do not do that," said Miss Enright, her features relaxing into a smile in spite of her attempts to retain her stern composure. "You know the Lieutenant and I are sworn enemies and have been since we left Malta, where we disagreed as to the sentiments which inspired the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Besides, his

crime is one that calls for education rather than condign punishment."

After throwing this Parthian arrow, she left the room.

"Why do you like to plague Helen so?" asked the Admiral.

"I don't enjoy the plaguing part, but my jibes always stir her up, and I cannot but admire the manner in which she conducts both attack and defence."

"I have given her all the education she asked for," said the Admiral, "but I sometimes wonder what would become of the world if all the women in it knew as much as Helen does."

"I don't think that day will ever come," said Victor. "If it does, women will become the teachers and men the students."

"But will they ever learn to command a frigate?" asked the Admiral.

"If women ever rule the world," replied Victor, "there will be no need of either frigates, or armies, or wars. All vexed questions will be settled by diplomacy, and no male diplomat can hope to compete successfully with a woman in that line of business."

"What kind of a place is it that Batistelli lives in?" asked the Admiral.

"Oh," said Victor, "it is a big stone house with a large tower at each end. The grounds are beautiful, but the interior of the house looks cheerless from our English point of view. It lacks that cosy, comfortable air which English homes have. But Monsieur Batistelli was very polite, and evinced a most hospitable disposition. I have no doubt that Miss Enright and yourself will greatly enjoy a week's sojourn there."

"I hope so," said the Admiral. "We will go tomorrow. I am greatly obliged to you, Lieutenant, and you may have your freedom until our return."

Victor knew that, so far as the Admiral was concerned, the interview was at an end.

"My dear Admiral," said he, "may I trespass on your time for a few minutes?"

"Why, certainly," was the reply. "I have nothing to do until dinner time, and there is a spare half hour."

"It will not take that length of time," said Victor. "Monsieur Batistelli extended a very polite invitation to me to become his guest, also, but I cannot accept—so do not speak of it to your daughter."

"And why not?" cried the Admiral. "Helen and I would be delighted to have you with us. I know you two quarrel, but I think you both enjoy it. I always thought that when I am not around you make up, but, as soon as I appear upon the scene, you feel obliged to begin your warfare again."

"You are not far from the truth, my dear Admiral," said Victor. "I should be happy to form one of your party were it not for a little affair, in which I became involved this morning, that must claim preference."

"An affair?" cried the Admiral; "not a love affair, I hope!"

"Oh, no!" said Victor, "something much more serious—an affair of honour!"

He then told the Admiral of his meeting with Vivienne Batistelli and his subsequent encounter with Count Mont d'Oro.

"These Corsicans are a hot-blooded race, and he will surely send me a challenge. I shall be obliged to meet him or he will hold me up as a coward. I must secure some one to serve as second. Have I your permission, Admiral, to ask one of my brother officers to act in that capacity?"

The Admiral leaned back in his chair and seemed to be considering the question from several points of view.

"I should say nothing about it on board ship," he

began. "Perhaps, after all, you will not hear from him. If the matter becomes known to any one on the vessel, all will know it; some will write home to England about it, and it may reach the Admiralty. You do not wish that to occur, for it would certainly retard your promotion. If the worst comes to the worst and the fellow challenges you, I will act for you and no one on the vessel will be the wiser."

At dinner both the Admiral and Victor were disposed to be contemplative, each thinking of the prospective duel and its possible results. Victor was also greatly disturbed at not seeing or hearing from Jack. He had made diligent inquiries, but without success. He therefore contented himself with the thought that Jack was pursuing his quest of Cromillian, or Bertha, or both.

After a long silence, Helen, who knew nothing of the impending conflict, started a little battle on her own account by referring again to mediæval customs.

"I yearn," said she, "for a return to the days of chivalry, when brave knights fought for their lady-loves. To me, there can be no sight more inspiring than two brave men contending for the favour of some fair maiden worthy of their love."

"Perhaps the days of chivalry may return once more," said Victor.

"Nonsense!" cried Helen. "In these days, there are few men brave enough to face each other in mortal combat. They are content to fire at each other with an intervening distance of half a mile or more. Why don't they do as did Julius Cæsar and his Roman warriors—advance with drawn swords and fall boldly upon their enemies? It was daring, and muscle, and swordsmanship that won battles in those days."

"And now it is marksmanship," said Victor. "You know the old saying, Miss Enright, that times change and we change with them. If we were Roman warriors, and time could be pushed back nearly eighteen hundred

years, your sanguinary wishes might be gratified; but, as things look now, the range of arms will increase, and armies and vessels will stay farther apart than ever during the progress of a battle."

"One reason why I have wished to come to Corsica," said Helen, "is to learn about the vendetta. The spirit of the old knights must survive in this island."

"Not at all!" cried the Admiral, taking part for the first time in the discussion. "The miserable rascals dare not meet each other in a fair fight, but lie in ambush and brutally assassinate their enemies. I am surprised, Helen, that you should entertain such sentiments."

"You do not understand me, father," said Helen. "What I wish to see is individual bravery rather than collective heroism. I do not wish to applaud a whole regiment or the entire crew of a frigate, but the one man who, by his valiant prowess, has shown himself worthy of renown."

The dinner was over and the discussion also came to an end. Victor lighted a cigar and went out upon the veranda to think over the matter which was uppermost in his mind. Being very far-sighted, he espied, a long distance off, an old building which had a deserted, tumble-down appearance. He left the veranda and walked towards it, finding it much farther away than he had anticipated.

He opened the door and entered. It was empty. It was, in reality, a large shed which probably had been used as a storehouse. He closed the door and found himself in utter darkness. Although the building was old, it was surely well constructed, for there was not a seam or break in it through which the light of the sun could enter. He threw the door open and carefully surveyed the interior once more. Across each corner of the structure, some six feet from the ground, four heavy joists were placed, but for what purpose Victor could

not divine. As he stood there, a strange thought came into his mind, and he smiled to himself with inward satisfaction.

On his way back to the hotel, he passed a cottage, in front of which, seated at a grindstone, a man, evidently a woodsman, was sharpening a number of axes. Victor stopped and regarded him. Then, he smiled again. What he saw evidently pleased him and there must have been some connection between the smile in the old shed and that which showed upon his face as he stood regarding the woodsman and the implements of his trade.

"My good friend," said Victor, "will you sell me a couple of those axes—the sharpened ones, I mean?"

"You can buy plenty of them in the town," the man replied.

"How much would two cost me?" asked Victor.

The man named the price.

"I will give you twice as much for two of yours," said Victor, and the bargain was soon concluded.

The man found a piece of old cloth in which Victor could wrap up his purchases, and he succeeded in reaching his room without his burden meeting the eye of the inquisitive. Then he sought the Admiral and had a short talk with him.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Sir Gilbert, "I never heard of such a thing before. It is a most remarkable idea. I suppose what Helen said at dinner put you up to it. What fools women can make of men, to be sure. Of course, I mean nothing personal by that, my dear Lieutenant, but I have read history, or rather Helen has read it to me, and it seems to me as though most of the silly things that men have done have been prompted by a desire to please some woman."

Victor was right when he expressed the opinion that Count Mont d'Oro would challenge him. The next

morning the card of M. François Villefort was sent up to his room, and, when the young man had exchanged the customary courtesies with Lieutenant Duquesne, he stated that the object of his visit was to present a message from his lifelong friend, Count Napier Mont d'Oro. Victor bowed, said that he had anticipated receiving such a civility from the Count, and asked him to accompany him to the room of his friend, Admiral Enright, who had consented to act as his second.

When M. Villefort and Admiral Enright were alone, the Admiral began the conversation.

"In my country," said he, "the first duty of a gentleman called upon to act in the capacity which we have assumed is to arrange, if possible, an honourable compromise."

"In Corsica," replied M. Villefort, "that matter is never considered. In fact, as you probably well know, Corsicans never fight duels in Corsica, but Count Mont d'Oro has lived for some time in Paris and, assuming that Lieutenant Duquesne is conversant with the French *code duello*, the Count has the courtesy to follow the French custom."

"Well," said the Admiral, "then we will consider that part of the subject closed. My friend, Lieutenant Duquesne, being the challenged party, has the choice of time, place, and weapons. I conferred with him upon the subject previous to your expected arrival, and there will, consequently, be no delay in arranging the preliminaries."

"I am delighted to hear it," said M. Villefort, "for my friend, Count Mont d'Oro, is anxious that the insult given to him should be avenged as soon as possible."

"On our part," said the Admiral, "we shall be delighted to accommodate you. The time fixed upon is midnight, to-morrow night; the place, a vacant shed which is in plain sight from the veranda of the hotel,

about three-quarters of a mile distant; the weapons, woodsmen's axes, sharpened by a Corsican; the contest to last five minutes, and in total darkness. At the end of that time, you and I are to enter the building with lights and see what remains of our friends."

"Allow me to say that I consider such levity unbecoming a gentleman. If your principal has given you instructions suited to an affair of honour, I am here to receive them."

"Exactly! I don't know what your customs are here, but in England we do not repeat our conditions more than once."

The Corsican was evidently impressed by the bluntness and directness of the Englishman's speech.

"Pardon me," said he, "but I did not understand what weapons had been selected by the challenged party."

"I thought I described them sufficiently," said the Admiral. "I said axes,—ordinary common woodsmen's axes—the sharper the better."

"And the place?" queried M. Villefort.

"If you will step to the window," said the Admiral, "I will show you. Do you see that old shed on the left-hand side of the road? That is the place selected by Lieutenant Duquesne. Time, midnight to-morrow night, the room to be in utter darkness, and the fight to last five minutes. Do I make myself understood?"

"Perfectly, monsieur," responded M. Villefort, "but I doubt very much if the Count will condescend to accept such ridiculous terms. Did you say that the room was to be dark?"

"Yes," replied the Admiral; "the Lieutenant says the windows are boarded up tightly and not a ray of light enters even in the daytime. I confess that they are the most re-mark-a-ble instructions I ever received. They quite stagger me, they do, indeed. But my principal says he will not change them."

"I will report the result of my mission to Count Mont d'Oro. If he refuses to accept the terms——"

The Admiral broke in: "Why, then we will let the matter drop just where it is; but Lieutenant Duquesne and myself will probably form an opinion as to the bravery of this member of the Corsican nobility, and we may express it to others. You might repeat to the Count what I have just said."

Miss Helen Enright was both astute and acute. Her father knew that, if he left the hotel late in the evening and did not return until after midnight, he would be obliged to make some sort of an explanation to his daughter.

"Better tell a white lie than a black one," said he to Victor. So it was arranged that they should pay a visit to the *Osprey* in the afternoon, giving Helen to understand that they might not return to the hotel until the next morning.

The night chosen was a stormy one. Heavy black clouds shut out the light of both moon and stars, and from them the rain descended. About eleven o'clock, the Lieutenant and the Admiral left the *Osprey*, preceded by a sailor carrying a ship's lantern to light the way. When they had covered about half the distance between the vessel and the hotel, the Admiral, turning to the sailor, said:

"Give me the lantern, Markland. I will carry it the rest of the way. You can find your way back to the quay in the dark?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" was the response. "I have been in darker places than this and came out all right."

The Admiral screened the lantern and waited at the corner of the road for Victor, who went to his room to obtain the axes. They then proceeded on their way towards the deserted building, the rain coming down in the proverbial torrents.

"I shall be much cut up," said Victor, "if this

wetting gives you a cold and an attack of rheumatism."

"If you don't get cut up," said the Admiral, "I will try to bear the rheumatism with patience."

"Thank you," said Victor; "you have always been a kind and good friend to me. My course in this matter, no doubt, seems inexplicable to you, but I have a reason for it which, some day, I will explain."

"My curiosity can wait," said the Admiral, "but I cannot promise as much if Helen gets wind of the affair."

They were the first to reach the building. They both entered and examined it thoroughly. The Admiral screened the lantern and looked about him. "It's as dark as a pocket," said he. Victor caught one of the crossbeams with both hands and drew himself up until his chin was even with it. Then he allowed himself to descend without attracting the attention of the Admiral. They went outside and, standing beneath the wide-spreading branches of a great tree, awaited the arrival of the other party.

About ten minutes before midnight, the sound of horses' hoofs and carriage wheels were heard, and, a few minutes later, Count Mont d'Oro and M. Villefort approached the building. As they did so, the Admiral turned the full glare of the lantern in their faces.

The usual courtesies were exchanged and the four men stood expectantly, the Admiral holding his watch so that the light from the lantern could fall upon it. Suddenly, he looked up and said:

"It is twelve o'clock, gentlemen."

The party entered the building, the Admiral holding up the lantern so that the interior could be examined by the Count and his second. Next, he took the axes from the cloth in which they had been wrapped and passed them to M. Villefort.

"Take your choice," said he. "As near as I can

judge, they are of the same weight and equally sharp."

M. Villefort selected one which he passed to Count Mont d'Oro, while the Admiral handed the other to Victor. The contestants were then placed in opposite corners of the room, facing each other.

"Are you ready?" asked the Admiral.

The duellists signified that they were.

"Monsieur Villefort and I will now leave you," said the Admiral. "As soon as we close the door, you are at liberty to change your positions, but you must not attack each other until you hear us cry *Time!* Five minutes thereafter, we shall open the door, and the contest must stop as soon as you see the light."

In about a minute, the Admiral and M. Villefort cried in unison:

"*TIME!*"

Count Mont d'Oro scuffled his feet upon the floor to give his opponent the idea that he had changed his position. Victor stood his axe up in the corner, reached the beam above him with both hands, drew himself up slowly, and assumed a sitting posture upon it. The Count struck out vigorously in front and to the right and left. He then took a circuit around the room, striking out in front, and then whirling about, he made vicious slashes at his unseen enemy. He next swung the axe about in a circle, but it met with no resistance.

Victor sneezed loudly. This so startled the Count, for the sound seemed very close to him, that he started back, coming in violent contact with the side of the building, bruising himself quite severely. He then advanced cautiously on tiptoe across the room. As he neared the corner where Victor was, the latter took his hat from his head and threw it down, necessarily at random. It chanced to strike the Count full in the face. He started back, a cry of affright escaping from him involuntarily. The Fates were against him. There

was just one rotten plank in the floor of the building, and upon that the Count stepped. It broke beneath his weight. Finding himself falling, and realising that his foot was caught in some way, he gave a violent pull and succeeded in wrenching his ankle so badly that when he tried to stand up he was forced to succumb to the intense pain, and fell prone upon the floor.

Realising that his opponent had met with some misadventure, Victor dropped from his perch, and, grasping his axe, stood upon the defensive. At that moment, the door was pushed open and the bright light of the lantern thrown upon the scene.

M. Villefort espied the form of the Count upon the floor and, rushing to him, gave him a sup of brandy from a flask which he had thoughtfully brought with him. The Admiral paid no attention to the Count, but sought the corner where Victor stood.

"Bless my soul!" cried the Admiral. "Are you a whole man?"

"I believe so, but somewhat played out," said Victor, and he leaned heavily upon the axe handle.

"But are you sure that you have all your limbs about you?"

"I think so. Two legs and two arms are the usual complement, I believe."

"No gashes in your head or back?"

"No, I think not. Oh, there is my hat!" and he stepped forward and picked it up.

"Well," cried the Admiral, "it is really the most remarkable preservation from death I ever heard of in all my life."

"I must trouble you, Admiral Enright," said M. Villefort, "to assist me in getting Count Mont d'Oro to his carriage. For reasons which you can understand, I do not wish to call the coachman, who is unaware of the nature of our visit here at this unseemly hour."

"Certainly," said the Admiral, "in the hour of defeat, the unfortunate can always count upon my sympathy and assistance."

Supported by the two men, the Count limped slowly towards the door, evidently suffering greatly. Before he reached it, Victor stepped forward:

"Do you acknowledge satisfaction, Count Mont d'Oro?"

The Count's face was contorted with pain and, for a moment, he did not reply. Then, he almost hissed out the words:

"From an English point of view—yes—but not from a Corsican. We shall meet again!"

When the Admiral returned, he took up the lantern.

"Are you going to take the axes?" he asked.

"No," said Victor, "we will leave those for the rent of the building."

That night, in the solitude of his own room, he took from its hiding-place the white rose with the blood-stained petals. Her rose and his blood!

"Sweet emblem of peace and love, thou art my talisman against evil, and, for her dear sake, these hands shall never be stained by the blood of one whom she loves. I swear it!"



CHAPTER XVI.

ANCESTRAL PRIDE.

AJACCIO, Alfieri, and Cromillian's camp formed the angles of an equilateral triangle; in other words, it was about five miles from Ajaccio to Alfieri; it was another five miles from Alfieri to Cromillian's camp. The two members of his band, however, who formed Andrea Fortier's escort, for Jack had given his assumed name to his companions, were too well acquainted with the country and too anxious to reach camp to travel ten miles when they knew that, by a short cut over the mountains and up the ravine, the distance was not more than five.

If some of the residents of Ajaccio, who had experienced a taste of Cromillian's justice, had known that his camp was in such close proximity to the town, they would certainly have tried to induce the officers of the law to attempt his capture. Yet, this would have been hard to effect. They would have had to rely upon the *gens d'armes* who, although they could not shirk duty when called upon to arrest a person within the limits of the town, were decidedly averse to invading the *maquis*. The bandits were such good shots, had such far-reaching rifles, and, besides, had such a way of firing from behind trees and stone walls, that the *gens d'armes* always scouted the idea of their being able to capture a bandit, and their officers were not loath to embrace the same opinion.

It was after midnight when Jack and his escort reached Cromillian's camp. He was at once taken into the presence of the Chief who, seated in a little grove,

was writing by the light of a fire. Jack presented the letter given to him by Victor, which Cromillian opened and read.

Thomas Glynne, who had followed close upon the heels of Jack and his companions, was very anxious to learn the reason for the young man's visit, under such circumstances, to this particular locality. He approached the camp, skulking behind one tree and then another, when a firm hand from behind grasped his coat collar, and he was hurled violently to the ground. He attempted to rise, but found himself surrounded by four heavily bearded, fierce-looking men, who grasped him and, without saying a word, took him at once to the little grove where Cromillian sat.

Thomas Glynne looked at Jack, who returned the gaze, and instantly recognised the man whom, of all on earth, he least desired to see. The thought occurred at once to each, "Why is he here?" but neither could answer the question.

Cromillian looked up. "Monsieur Andrea Fortier," said he, addressing Jack, "my thanks are due you for the great service which you have rendered one of my band. This letter, although addressed to me, is for another person. He cannot read, but I will communicate the contents to him and will write his reply, which you can take back to him to-morrow. See that he has food and a bed—the best we can afford," and Cromillian waved his hand towards the two men who had accompanied Jack to the camp.

As soon as Jack had departed, Cromillian turned to the four captors of Thomas Glynne.

"Whom have we here?" he asked.

Glynne felt that it was a crucial time with him. He must tell a good story, or the bandits might look upon him as a spy and treat him in a summary manner. He was naturally bold and resourceful, and he now summoned all his wits to his aid.

"Will you allow me to ask a question?" he said, addressing Cromillian.

The latter nodded.

"What did that young man who brought the letter to you say his name was?"

"He gave the name of Andrea Fortier," Cromillian replied.

"That is not his real name," cried Glynne. "My name is Thomas Glynne. I am an Englishman. His name is Jack De Vinne and he, too, is an Englishman. He caused my ward, Bertha Renville, to run away and he is here to join her. I promised her father on his dying bed that I would be a father to her and protect her. This Andrea Fortier, as he calls himself, is of low origin, while she is a girl of wealth and refinement. He seeks but her fortune, and I appeal to you for justice."

"Take him away," cried Cromillian, "and bring the other man here."

His commands were quickly carried out and Jack, who left his supper unfinished, once more stood before Cromillian.

"What did you say your name was?" asked Cromillian.

Jack, who had no idea of what had been said by Glynne in his absence, replied: "Andrea Fortier."

Cromillian smiled grimly. "I mean your real name, young man. I know what it is, or I think I do."

It immediately dawned upon Jack that Thomas Glynne had told some sort of a story in order to explain his presence near the bandit camp, and he resolved to make a clean breast of it and tell the whole truth.

"Sir," he began, "I assumed the name of Andrea Fortier as I did not wish my presence here to become known to the man who has just left you. This I explained to Lieutenant Duquesne, who intrusted me with the letter which I delivered to you. My real name is

John De Vinne. I am a Englishman. I am in love with the ward of the man Glynne. Because of dislike and dissatisfaction she left his home, from no suggestion of mine, as I knew nothing whatever about it until she arrived in Paris. Her guardian is withholding from her facts relative to the wealth left her by her father, and is using every endeavour to keep it in his own hands. She fears her guardian, and I am here to protect her and, if possible, make her my wife. I am well connected and am amply able to give her the position in life to which she is entitled. This man, her guardian, must have followed me from Ajaccio.

"Owing to a combination of circumstances which it would take a long time to relate, the young lady went to Paris to avail herself of the protection of Countess Mont d'Oro, an old friend of her father's. She is now visiting the Countess at Alfieri. We both learned of her presence here and each of us has come to claim her. I have not seen her as yet, nor do I think he has. Sir, that is the whole story."

"I believe you have spoken the truth, young man," said Cromillian. "The guardian has told an entirely different story, which may or may not be true. If yours is true, his is false. If his is true, yours is false. When in doubt, I always settle the matter for myself. I will go to Alfieri, see this Mademoiselle Renville and her chaperon, the Countess, and find out which of the stories is true. In the meantime, both you and her guardian will be obliged to remain with my band and, necessarily, share our comforts and discomforts, the latter predominating."

He sent for Paoli and gave him a strict command that neither Glynne nor Jack should be allowed to leave camp until permission came from him.

The next morning, Paoli asked Cromillian if there was anything special on hand for that day.

"I have not seen my old mother for three months,

and I thought, if you could spare me, I should like to make her a visit."

"Go, by all means," said Cromillian. "I know of nothing now that will require your services, particularly. I am sorry I cannot send that young fellow who brought the letter last night back with the answer. Can you pick me out a good man who can disguise himself so well that the *gens d'armes* at Ajaccio will not recognise him? If you can, send him here. I do not care to know who he is."

An hour later, an apparently old man, with long white hair, a bent figure, and a wrinkled face, presented himself to Cromillian and said, in a squeaky voice:

"I was sent by Paoli."

Cromillian did not speak, but handed him a letter addressed to Lieutenant Victor Duquesne, at the hotel at Ajaccio.

"Bring back an answer," said Cromillian. The old man bowed and withdrew.

The bearer of the missive appeared old and decrepit until he was beyond the borders of the camp. Then he suddenly developed an agility entirely at variance with his aged appearance, for he ran at full speed along the road which led to his destination. Hearing a woodsman singing at his work, he quickly resumed the appearance of old age and maintained it until he was out of sight of the wielder of the axe.

When he arrived at the hotel, he learned that Lieutenant Duquesne was in his room. He refused to state his business, saying that what he had to deliver he must place in the Lieutenant's hands himself. So Victor told the servant to have him shown up to his room.

The old man sat down while Victor read his letter. It was with difficulty that he refrained from exhibiting physical signs of astonishment at its contents and, on several occasions, he came near giving audible vent to

his feelings. He restrained himself, however, and only the play of his naturally expressive features gave any indication of what was passing in his mind.

"There was to be an answer, to show that I delivered the letter to the proper party," said the old man.

Victor wrote, folded, and sealed the missive and placed it, with a silver coin, in the man's hand.

"Take it to the one who sent you," was Victor's parting admonition.

The old man thanked him. Victor opened the door, and, standing at the head of the stairs, watched the aged messenger as he went slowly down and out into the street. Then Victor returned to his room and read and re-read his letter until the words and the lines became blurred and he could see no more.

It began:

"MY DEAR VANDEMAR:

"You will no doubt be surprised when you see the name upon the outside of this letter, and then compare it with the one which you have just read, upon learning that it means one and the same individual. You will also, no doubt, be surprised to learn that your right name is Vandemar Della Coscia, instead of Victor Duquesne, and that your father's name is not, and never was, Hector Duquesne, but the one which you will find at the end of this letter."

Vandemar looked and read the name—*Manuel Della Coscia*.

"An explanation is due you, my son. Seventeen years ago, a man named Conrad Batistelli was found dead in one of his fields, and the evidence pointed to me as the murderer. There was no vendetta between our families, and I could not have pleaded that in justification. I did not commit the deed. The one who did is dead and cannot exonerate me. In order to save him, I consented to leave the island and take you with me.

I did not care for my own life, but I did not wish to see yours cut short by the hand of the assassin.

"I have sent for you to come to Corsica because I wish to prove my innocence and to restore to you the noble name which is your birthright. There is no older family on the island than that of Della Coscia, and no young Corsican can boast a prouder lineage of noble and patriotic men. Your ancestors were Corporals, and the honour of their names descends and rightfully belongs to you.

"Beware of the Batistellis. They are your sworn foes, and seek your life. Be wary and commit no indiscretion. Above all, do not allow yourself to be entrapped. I will see you soon, but I must choose the time and place. Do not leave Corsica until I have seen you. Until then,

"Your loving father,

"MANUEL DELLA COSCIA."

The aged messenger who had brought the letter to Vandemar, and who had the reply in his possession, walked slowly along the main street of Ajaccio, accosting no one, looking neither to the right nor left. When he reached the Batistelli castle, he made his way to the servants' quarters and asked to see Manassa.

In response to his summons, a man appeared whose white hair and wrinkled skin indicated that he was very old, but whose erect figure and strenuous walk both seemed to deny the imputation. He was a man of great stature, apparently still retaining marked bodily strength. He must have been handsome in his youth, and was still attractive and commanding in appearance.

"I wish to see your master, Pascal Batistelli," said the messenger.

"He is busy in his library," was Manassa's reply. "Come again some other time."

"Lean down and I will tell you something."

Manassa complied. A smile, fiendish in its nature, went over his face. He nodded his head a dozen times, chuckling as he did so.

"Come with me," he said. "My master will be glad to see you."

"Who are you?" asked Pascal Batistelli, as Cromillian's messenger approached the table where he sat.

The man looked to see if Manassa had left the room. Assuring himself of the fact, he asked:

"Will you keep my secret if I tell you who I am? It will pay you to do so and will injure you if you do not."

"Under those circumstances, I will give you my word," said Pascal.

"I am Paoli, Cromillian's lieutenant."

Pascal started to his feet, crying: "What are you here for? What business have I with you or your leader's gang of thieves and cut-throats?"

"Not so fast, my good sir," said Paoli. "We may injure some, but we benefit others, and I have come here to do you a great favour."

"I do not understand you," said Pascal, "but go on," and he sank back into his chair.

"You have heard, I suppose," said Paoli, "that Vandemar Della Coscia, whose father murdered yours, was about to be foolish enough to come back to Corsica. What would you say if I told you that both Vandemar and his father were now on the island?"

"I should say that you lied!" cried Pascal.

"Let it go that way then," Paoli coolly replied. "I know Vandemar is here, for I have seen him. No one who had known a Della Coscia could mistake him. I am sure, too, that the father is here; I don't yet know where he is, but I shall find him. If I put you on their track, what do I get?"

"A hundred louis d'or for each," cried Pascal Batistelli.

"Will you put it in writing?" asked Paoli.

"No," said Pascal, "the word of a Batistelli is sufficient."

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when the old man again presented himself to Cromillian and handed him the letter which Vandemar had written, and which he had most carelessly and incautiously addressed to Manuel Della Coscia.

Cromillian looked at the superscription, and then said:

"I will see that this letter reaches the party to whom it is addressed."

The old man bowed once more, and soon vanished among the trees.

Cromillian looked again at the superscription on the letter.

"Young and thoughtless!" he ejaculated. "Headstrong and brave, too, or he would not be true to his name."

He placed the letter inside of his jacket and walked briskly into the dense wood, nor did he stop until he was fully a mile from the camp. He then threw himself upon the turf, broke the seal, and read the following:

"MY DEAR FATHER:

"I was not only surprised but delighted to receive your letter. I have never felt that I was of French birth, and I knew I was not English. I am glad to know that I am a Corsican. I never knew before what ancestral pride was, but now it surges over my heart like the waves of the ocean. Do not fear that I will leave Corsica before we meet. If the vessel sails, I will endeavour to get a furlough. If I cannot, I shall resign my position in the British Navy and devote my life to proving your innocence and reclaiming my heritage. I do not fear the Batistellis. I hear that one is a coward

and the other a drunkard, but the daughter is an angel, who is betrothed to a devil named Count Mont d'Oro. I will keep away from them.

“Ever your loving and dutiful son,
“VANDEMAR DELLA COSCIA.”

It was long after dark when Paoli reported for duty to his chief.

“How is your mother?” asked Cromillian.

“But poorly,” was Paoli's reply. “I do not think that she can live much longer. She made me promise that I would come to see her again in a week.”

“And you must go,” said Cromillian. “Bad men, as well as good men, usually have good mothers, and wickedness in a son can be atoned for greatly by filial tenderness.”

“How did the messenger succeed with his errand?” asked Paoli.

“Completely,” said Cromillian. “I have had a long walk. I am tired and footsore, for I had to go a long way from here to find the one who wrote the letter which I sent, and to whom the reply belonged.”

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

"WHERE were you last night?" asked Helen of her father, the morning after the duel. "I had one of my nervous attacks and went to your room to get the remedy which I knew was in your portmanteau. It was raining hard. I remained in your room until half-past twelve. I slept little, but supposed you were on the vessel. I went to your room again at four o'clock and found the door locked. Why did you come home from the vessel at such an unseemly hour?"

The Admiral attempted to explain matters without disclosing the real reason for his absence from home, but his daughter subjected him to a line of cross-questioning which left his story, at the close, in a most pitiable condition as regarded probability and continuity. Finally, in a state of mental despair, the Admiral cried:

"Well, Helen, I'll tell you the truth. The fact is, Victor had a quarrel with a Corsican and they fought a duel. I didn't wish it to become known on the ship, so I acted as his second. Now you have the whole of it, so far as I am concerned. If you wish to know more, get it from Victor."

In a short time, Victor's well-known double knock was heard at the door. No sooner had he entered than Helen began questioning him in regard to the duel. He did not feel disposed to disclose the real cause of his first controversy with Count Mont d'Oro. He simply said that the Count insulted him and he knocked him down.

"Of course, I expected a challenge," he continued,

"and we had it out in good old-fashioned style. I remembered what you said, Miss Helen, about the brave old Roman soldiers, but I could not obtain any swords used in the Gallic war, so I chose axes as being the nearest approach to them. It is a wonder he did not cut me into pieces, for he fought like a madman."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Admiral. "As I told you at the time, you had a most re-mark-a-ble escape from death."

Helen could not refrain from expressing her admiration for the young sailor who had dared to meet his enemy in single combat.

"You are a brave young man, Lieutenant Duquesne," she exclaimed, "and for that reason, and that only, will I forgive you for several very sarcastic remarks which you made to me on the way from Malta to Genoa."

"Miss Enright," said Victor, in the gravest possible manner, "if I were sure that you would forgive me for all my misdeeds during my acquaintance with you, I should not hesitate to fight a duel every day for a week."

"I am not sure that such a course would balance the account," said Helen, "but I am very glad that I came to Corsica. It is my constant desire to see or hear something new."

"Thus reassured," said Victor, "I will take you both into my confidence. Since my arrival here, I have learned what was, to me, a most surprising piece of intelligence. My father, whom I have seen but once since I was six years of age, is now in Corsica and is coming soon to Ajaccio to meet me. If the vessel sails before his arrival, I shall have to ask you, my dear Admiral, for a furlough. If you cannot grant it, I shall be obliged to resign my position."

"Bless my soul!" cried the Admiral. "What a re-mark-a-ble idea that is of yours. Two months still re-

main before I am due in England, and one thing is certain, I shall not accept your resignation. But how did you find out about this?"

"I had a letter from him," replied Victor. "He tells me I was born in Corsica. My ancestors were Corporals."

"Ah, yes!" cried Helen. "I have read about them. If I remember correctly, it was sometime in the tenth century that the people—worn out with centuries of oppression—rose against the tyrannical feudal barons, waged a successful war against them, set up an independent government of their own on democratic principles, and called their country *Terra del Commune*. The officials were all elected by the people, and among them were *caporali*, 'corporals' or head men, chosen by the 'Fathers of the Commune' to preside over their local assemblies, and to represent them before the General Council; being especially charged with the defence of the rights of the people—in fact, they were the 'Tribunes of the People.' In course of time the office became hereditary, and the Corporals became a most powerful class—I think I have got it straight!"

"Your account is historically correct," said Victor, "and no wonder that Corsicans esteem it a great honour to be descended from these 'Tribunes of the People,' as you have called them. No man in Corsica has greater cause to revere and worship his ancestors than I have."

"I admire the Chinese," said Helen, "because of their devotion to the aged and the reverence which they show for their ancestors. But I fear it will not be many years before these twin virtues will become extinct in European countries."

"There is another subject," said Victor, "about which I wish to speak to you, Admiral"—Helen arose from her chair—"and your daughter, too. Please remain, Miss Enright. It is a matter in which you are fully as much concerned as your father."

"Do you wish father to act as your second in another duel?" she asked.

"The course which I have decided to follow, with your kind permission, may lead to one, and perhaps something worse. As I told you, Admiral, when I took Lord Colton's letter of introduction to Monsieur Pascal Batistelli, he not only expressed his pleasure that you and your daughter were to become his guests, but also extended an invitation to me to be one of the party."

"Oh, do come!" cried Helen, impulsively. A slight flush came to her sallow cheeks. It was seldom that she said or did anything without due reflection. Then, she added: "With whom can I quarrel on apparently inconsequential points unless you accompany us?"

"Why, bless my soul!" cried the Admiral, "what a re-mark-a-ble idea to leave us alone in a strange country, with no one to protect us and avenge our honour in case we are insulted."

"I had not intended," said Victor, "to accept the invitation, so I asked you not to mention it to your daughter. Upon second thoughts, which they say are best, I have decided to go, if she be willing." He turned to Helen: "You have kindly settled my uncertainty on that point."

"We had intended to go to-day," said the Admiral, "but Helen lost so much sleep last night that I told the landlord we should remain another day."

Why had Vandemar Della Coscia changed his mind? Since reading his father's letter, he had given serious thought to his present situation and his future actions in what he had learned was his native land. If, as his father said, the Batistellis were his sworn enemies and would seek his life as soon as they discovered his identity, would it not be a wise course, he argued, to visit them, now that he was unknown to them, and learn the character of the men with whom he had to deal.

He did not know that the story was rife throughout

Corsica that Vandemar Della Coscia would soon return, despite the threats of his enemies, and claim his heritage. If he had known this, he probably would not have been so self-confident and would have been satisfied to remain in seclusion at the hotel until his father appeared. The rumour about Vandemar's intended return had started, as most rumours do, from nothing. One day, while Paoli was conversing with Cromillian, he remarked that if Manuel Della Coscia or his son Vandemar did not return soon to Corsica and reclaim their inheritance, it would escheat to the government, according to the law.

"Don't you worry yourself about that," Cromillian replied. "Both father and son will be in Corsica before they lose their rights."

The next day, Paoli told several of his companions, in strict confidence, that he had it on the best authority that Vandemar Della Coscia was coming back to Corsica, and on no very distant day, either. So interesting a rumour soon spread throughout the island, and there were hundreds of sharp eyes which inspected all strangers carefully.

While the little party at the hotel was waiting for the time to arrive which would mark its departure for Batistelli Castle, an interesting event was taking place in the rather humdrum life of their prospective host.

Count Mont d'Oro's coachman, who had driven him to the duel, easily divined what had taken place in the old shed that night. Villefort had given him a louis d'or and told him to keep his mouth shut, but the coachman spent the louis d'or for wine at Madame Valliet's, and when he opened his mouth to drink the wine, he did not shut it again until he had told all that he knew, together with some fanciful additions. Julien Batistelli, who was a constant visitor at Madame Valliet's *cabaret*, heard the story, and, naturally, told it to his brother. Pascal at once visited the Count to express

his sympathy and to ask whether he could be of any service.

It chanced that Bertha was passing her prescribed hour with the Count, and was reading to him when M. Batistelli was announced. She started to leave the room, but, before she could do so, the Count introduced his visitor and she was obliged to remain. M. Batistelli was thought to be insensible to the charms of women, and it was for that reason, probably, that the Count made him acquainted with Miss Renville. To the Count's surprise, however, Pascal entered into an animated conversation with Bertha and made himself so agreeable and was, apparently, so regardless of the Count's suffering that the latter groaned loudly—not really from pain, but actually from sheer jealousy. Before leaving, Pascal said that he should take the opportunity to pay his respects to the Countess, should ask her to visit them when some expected guests arrived, and he hoped that Miss Renville would accompany her.

The fact was that Pascal Batistelli had seen so many beautiful women with dark hair, dark eyes, and the complexions which belong to brunettes, that he was unable to pick out one whom he thought would be more desirable as a wife than a dozen others.

But Bertha Renville was a revelation to him. He had never before seen a woman with such hair, which looked like gold when the sunlight fell upon it, and with such white hands and cheeks, the latter tinted with a roseate flush, and he looked forward with fond anticipation to the time when this beautiful English girl should become his guest, and the recipient of the palatial hospitality which he mentally resolved to lavish upon her.

After dinner on the day when the conversation had taken place between Victor and the Admiral and his daughter, it suddenly occurred to the former that he would pay a visit to the vessel and get his double-bar-

relled fowling-piece. He told the Admiral of his intention, adding:

"You know I am very fond of shooting and, no doubt, there is plenty of game in Corsica."

"I understand," said the Admiral, "that the game most sought after by Corsicans is human beings."

As he heard the remark, the thought came quickly to Victor's mind, "I am going into the lion's den," but his reply contained no indication of the thought.

"I trust, my dear Admiral, that we shall not be called upon to take part in a vendetta, or be the spectators of one, during our visit."

The next morning, the aspect of nature and the feelings of the Admiral and the others of his party were in accord, and, at an early hour, a conveyance, bearing them and their luggage, was on its way to their destination. It did not take long for the visitors to become acquainted with the brothers, Pascal and Julien, and their sister, Vivienne. Helen was greatly attracted by, and interested in the beautiful young Corsican girl.

Julien, the younger brother, was a decidedly handsome fellow, and, when sober, was engaging and witty in conversation. Some delicate sparring took place between Helen and Julien, and the young lady found him to be no mean antagonist in the lingual battle; but she was decidedly his superior in historical knowledge, and poor Julien was finally discomfited, he showing an unpardonable lack of acquaintance with the early customs of the ancient Persians. She was not surprised to find, at the end of several days, that Vivienne had little love for her brother Pascal, but bestowed all her affection upon Julien.

Victor was an interested observer of what was going on in the house and about it. He learned that Countess Mont d'Oro lived on the adjoining estate, and heard that Pascal Batistelli and young Count Napier were great friends. He saw that Pascal made a daily

visit to the next house, presumably to see Count Mont d'Oro, who, he was told by one of the Batistelli servants, had sprained his ankle in alighting from his carriage and was confined to his room. Victor wondered whether Pascal had made their visit a subject of conversation. If so, the Count probably knew that his late antagonist was in close proximity. If the Count and Pascal were friends, and either learned of his identity, they would both be his sworn enemies. But what did that matter, after all? If the contest was to come, it might as well take place soon as later. He, however, remembered his father's injunction and determined that the disclosure should not be made by himself. When his enemies learned who he was, the discovery must be due to their own acuteness.

On the first and second evenings following their arrival, Julien remained at home after dinner, and Helen and he indulged in badinage and repartee in a manner highly entertaining to their listeners. On the third day, however, he did not appear at dinner, nor during the evening.

About ten o'clock, the Admiral and Helen having gone to their rooms, for the evening had been a comparatively dull one, Victor lighted a cigar and strolled through the grounds. As he passed the entrance to the wooded path, he looked down, wishing, foolishly, as he acknowledged to himself, that he might see Vivienne there, looking as beautiful as she did on that eventful morning. He thought to himself how delightful her company would be if they could walk through the garden which was bathed in the soft rays of the moon.

He had no idea how late it was when he heard, as Bertha had done during her first night in Corsica, the singing of a band of drunken revellers on their way homeward. He stepped into the wooded path, being thus effectually concealed from view. The party stopped at the Batistelli gateway and effusive good-nights and

good-byes were uttered by the members of the company, who, judging from their manner of speech, were in varying stages of intoxication.

The singers proceeded on their way, but one solitary figure, after fumbling for some time at the gate, succeeded in opening it and staggered along the pathway which led to the servants' quarters. Then a replica of the scene which had been viewed by Bertha was presented to Victor's astonished gaze.

Vivienne, who had evidently been waiting for the return home of her wayward brother, came out to meet him, but, as on the previous occasion, he repulsed her offer of assistance, and, in return for her sisterly tenderness, cursed her, and pushed her from him.

Victor was so angry that he was on the point of rushing forward and hurling the sot to the ground, when he reflected that the affair was no concern of his and that he had no right to interfere. Julien's blow, although it staggered Vivienne, did not cause her to fall, and he reeled forward, his sister following him at a respectful distance. A few minutes later, the door closed after them. Victor went to his room wondering how young men could so debase themselves with drink and, above all, how they could act with such inhumanity towards their sisters, whose interest in them sprang not from self-interest but from love.

The next day after this affair, Julien was present at dinner, but did not seem like his former self. Miss Enright's bright sallies were unheeded by him, so she gave up such an unprofitable game and turned her attention to Victor, but he made only lame replies. Julien's condition had a depressing effect, and all were glad when the meal was over.

Victor again lighted his cigar and found his way to the garden. There was no moon; instead, the sky was overcast and there were evidences of an approaching storm. Unconsciously, he entered the wooded path and

walked slowly down towards the brook where he had first seen Vivienne. Would that beautiful picture ever fade from his memory? He thought not. Every day that he remained in the same house with her, it came before him and, each day, it seemed painted in stronger colors.

He retraced his steps and, when near the entrance of the path, saw the gleam of a lantern, its rays disclosing the face of Julien Batistelli, who opened the gate, crossed the road, and then took a direction which led to the thickly wooded *maquis* beyond. Victor was on the point of leaving his place of retreat, when another figure came in sight. It was that of a woman and, although he could not see her features distinctly, he knew at once that it was Vivienne. She, too, opened the gate, crossed the road, and proceeded in the same direction as had her brother.

What could be her errand? There was but one explanation—she was following her brother with the intention of trying to induce him to return home. Remembering the occurrence of the previous evening, Victor was filled with fears for her safety. What if her brother should give her a violent blow, leave her senseless in the woods, and a heavy storm should come up?

Victor made his way quickly to his room, caught up his gun, examined it to see if it was loaded and primed, threw a long weather-proof cloak over his shoulders, concealing the gun beneath it, and was soon treading the same path over which Julien and his sister had passed.

Although Madame Valliet's *cabaret* could be reached by following the road, it was much nearer if the intending visitor made a short cut through the *marquis*. Even then, it was a rough, hard walk of at least two miles. Julien had covered about one-half of the distance when he came to an open space upon one side of which there were some rocky cliffs. The place had been

named the "half-way house" by the revellers, who often stopped to rest on their way homeward at night.

Julien put down his lantern and, taking a bottle from his pocket, indulged in a long drink. He was not satisfied with the quality of wine which he drank at the *cabaret*, but brought a bottle of *eau de vie* home with him so that he could satisfy his appetite during the day. Then he sat down upon a projecting rock to rest for a while before proceeding on his way.

Suddenly, he felt a light touch upon his shoulder, and he looked up into the face of his sister. Starting to his feet, he exclaimed angrily:

"What! You follow me? You set yourself to spy out my actions? You dog my footsteps?"

"Oh, Julien!" cried Vivienne; "do not be angry with me. I knew that you were going to Madame Vallet's, and so I followed you. You were not yourself at dinner, and every one noticed it. Oh, Julien, do not shame me in the presence of our guests. Come home with me and promise to keep away from the *cabaret* until they have gone."

"Go home, Vivienne! It's none of your business where I go."

"I will not leave you in this lonely place. You must come home with me, Julien. There is going to be a storm and you will not be able to find your way home."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Julien. "I have my lantern, and some of the boys will come home with me. They always do."

"But remember our guests. When they have gone, although I shall have no peace of mind when you are away from home on such errands, I will say no more. Come home, Julien!"

"I say I will not!" Then, a little of the man showed itself in him.

"But you are a good girl, Vivienne, to brave the

darkness and the danger to follow a miserable fellow like me. I sat down here to think."

"To think of what? Oh, tell me," cried Vivienne.

"Of my disgrace, for one thing. I am in debt, as usual, and this very day Pascal called me a profligate, gambler, and drunkard, and refused to give me any more money. Damn him!"

"Oh, Julien! You know that Pascal has paid your debts again and again until he is discouraged. You make promises and break them. Is it strange that he has become incensed and has lost confidence in you? You persist in going to that woman's house, a vile place, a resort for gamblers."

"Stop that nonsense! I will go where I like. Who made you and my brother rulers over me? He is a hard, cold, cruel, selfish beast, and you know it! I don't blame you, sister. You have always been kind to me, but you think I can live upon my income. Bah! I want money! I must have it! I will have it! The only way I can get it is by gambling, for I am always lucky. You are a fool—clear out, I want to be alone."

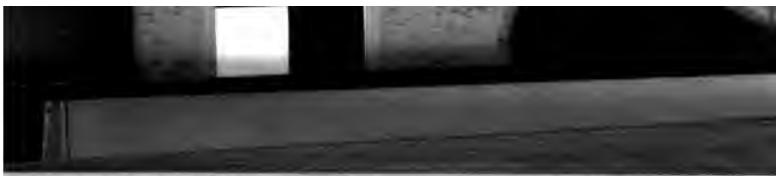
"But your luck will turn some day," said his sister.

"I hope it won't to-night. I'll drink to my own success."

"No, no! Oh, Julien! you are not yourself. Give me that bottle, I beg of you."

As she said this, she tried to take the bottle from him. He kept her back with one hand, while, with the other, he put the bottle to his mouth. Vivienne sprang forward, snatched the bottle from his grasp, and threw it against the cliff.

"Pascal was right!" she cried, vehemently. "You are a profligate and a drunkard. You are here alone in this dangerous wood, and you brutalise yourself to the point of imbecility, rendering yourself wholly incapable of defending your sister and yourself in case we are attacked by bandits."



Julien stood as if stupefied. His condition was due largely to the quantity of brandy which he had drunk, for there was but little in the bottle when his sister took it from him; but, despite his besotted condition, he was really astounded at his sister's words, for she had never spoken in that way to him before. As Julien did not reply, Vivienne thought she had influenced him at last, and she followed up her presumed advantage:

"Oh, Julien, my best beloved brother, come, come home with me!" As she said this, she took his arm. "I cannot leave you here alone. Hear the thunder! See, it lightens! I will sell some of my jewels, as I have many times before. You shall have money. Oh, come! The rain will soon be upon us."

Julien did not answer this impassioned appeal, but withdrew his arm from her loving clasp, took up his lantern, and started off in the direction which led to the *cabaret*. Vivienne lost command of herself. Never before had he so stubbornly resisted her loving entreaties. She would sting him into speech!

"Stop, Julien!" she cried. "I have one word more to say to you."

He looked back.

"Julien Batistelli," cried Vivienne, "hear the last word that I have to say to you. *Rimbecco! Rimbecco!*"

Julien put down his lantern and rushed angrily towards her.

"I hurl the base lie back in your teeth!" he cried. "Dear God, that I should live to see this hour! The red stain of *Rimbecco* stamped upon the brow of a brave son of a noble father. You dare not repeat that word!"

Vivienne looked at him with flashing eyes: "I am a daughter of the noble father whose name you have dishonoured. *Rimbecco!* Do you hear? I have repeated it! Every man, woman, and child in Corsica repeats

it, and you, a strong man, the son of your father, are wasting your precious time in drinking and gambling—time that should be spent in seeking out the man in whose veins runs the vile blood of the ruthless Della Coscia. *Rimbecco!*”

Hardly had that word of deepest reproach which can be uttered to a Corsican fallen from her lips, when her brother, exerting all his brute force, felled her to the ground.

“You are no longer a sister of mine!” he cried. “You have insulted me past forgiveness.”

He turned and dashed into the dark woods beyond, forgetful of the lantern, the rays of which shone upon the pallid face of the prostrate girl. Vivienne was in an unconscious state. The blow had been a cruel one, before which even a strong man would have gone down.

An old hag, bearing a bundle of fagots upon her back, was plodding slowly homeward. She stopped when she caught sight of the lantern and, looking about her, saw the inanimate form of a woman upon the ground, not far distant.

“A lantern!” the old woman muttered. “She must have brought it, but I did not see it when she passed my house. I did not see it when she went by in the woods, but I can see now the flash of diamonds upon her fingers, on her neck, and in her ears. A quarrel with her lover, most likely! More fool she to care for one who could leave her like this! Lucky for me, though!”

She knelt beside Vivienne, and the jewels were soon in her possession.

“These are nice French boots, just the right size for my little girl, and this beautiful dress will bring me a fine sum. Why should she possess all that riches can bestow and I go about clothed in rags? It is my right to take all that I can get. I, a bandit’s mistress—

she, some rich man's daughter; but her head must lie as low as mine some day. That is one comfort."

She proceeded deliberately to make as small a bundle as possible of the clothing and other articles of which she had despoiled the unconscious girl, and, having done so, put it under her arm and disappeared among the trees.

Hardly had she done so, when Victor, walking rapidly, carrying his gun upon his shoulder, reached the place. He espied the lantern and, running forward, caught it up.

"Where can they be?" he cried. "What has happened to them?"

He held the lantern up and peered about him. It almost fell from his grasp at the sight which met his gaze. In an instant, he was kneeling beside Vivienne, holding the lantern so that the light would shine full in her face. Her eyes were closed; her form motionless. He took one of her hands, which felt cold and dropped lifeless from his grasp.

"My God, can she be dead?" He started to his feet and looked about him. "Who has done this?" he cried.

His voice must have been heard by Vivienne, for she showed signs of returning consciousness. Victor again knelt beside her. She opened her eyes and looked up at him. He put his arm about her and raised her to a sitting posture.

"What has happened?" he asked. "How came you to be in this plight?"

Vivienne for the first time recognised her condition. She would say nothing against her brother, so she answered:

"I must have been attacked and robbed of my clothing." Then the contemplation of her situation overcame her, temporarily, and, abashed and ashamed, she burst into tears, crying piteously:

"What shall I do? How shall I get home?"

Victor removed the long cloak which he wore and passed it to her. Then, turning his face away, he said:

"Throw that about you—it will protect you. Fear nothing, for a true friend awaits your commands."

Vivienne did as he suggested, wrapping about her the great cloak, which reached nearly to her feet.

"Monsieur!"

Victor turned quickly. Vivienne stood before him. Stepping back, he regarded her.

"Why!" he cried, "the scoundrels have taken your boots, too." Removing his under coat, he threw it upon the ground before her, saying as he did so:

"Mademoiselle, stand upon that. The ground is damp and you will get a fever."

"Monsieur," Vivienne repeated, "some good angel has guided your footsteps to this place. Merciful God, I thank Thee. Never have I felt the need of human sympathy as I do to-night. But for you, I must have died in this dreary place, alone and uncared for."

The excitement attending her interview with her brother, the blow which she had received, and the discovery of the loss of her jewels and clothing, together formed the severest trial to which this delicate and tenderly nurtured girl had ever been subjected. As she stood there, it all came back to her, and the dreadful scene was acted over again in her mind. The nervous tension was too great, and she fell in a dead swoon at the feet of her rescuer.

"She has fainted and I am powerless to help her. She may die here before I can get assistance." He raised her in his arms and looked tenderly at the cold, pallid face:

"Beloved of my soul, I may speak now that my voice cannot reach thee. I may gaze into thy beauteous face and press thy form close to my throbbing heart. Oh,

Vivienne! Can hate dwell in a soul encased in a form like thine—a form upon which heaven has stamped its signet seals of beauty and love? No, no! It is impossible—and yet, I know that if my true name were but breathed into thy ears, those lovely eyes which, but a moment ago, were gazing into mine with such holy trust, such infinite tenderness, would be filled with horror and dismay. I am forever proscribed from creating any sentiment in thy heart save that of intensest hatred and loathing. Cruel fate—ruthless destiny! Why am I to suffer thus—to see her—to adore her—only to lose her?

“Vivienne, dearest object of my heart, would that I could pass thus, with my arms about thee, into that better world, where strife and hate, vendettas and revenge, murder and death, are things unknown. There, in the blessed company of the angels, I might teach thy pure soul to love mine and, with thee, enjoy an eternity of blissful rest.”

Vivienne's lips parted and a faint touch of colour came to her cheeks. Victor removed his cap and fanned her, vigorously. The cool, fresh air soon revived her. As soon as she realised her position, she endeavoured to free herself from his arms and rise to her feet, but she was too weak and would have fallen again if he had not prevented it. Again, she tried to free herself from him.

“I am weak and helpless,” she cried. “How dare you!”

Again she strove to sustain herself without his support, but it was a futile effort.

“The Holy Mother of God,” cried Victor, “will bear testimony to my sincerity when I swear to you that you have been as safe in my arms as in those of a mother. Sacred to me is, and ever has been, the protection of female purity and innocence. With a brother's care you must allow me to guard your precious life until I can

restore you, unharmed, into the keeping of those whose blessed right it is to love and protect you."

"I was bewildered—I knew not what I said. Forgive me," she pleaded.

"An angel like yourself, mademoiselle, needs not to be forgiven by a sinful mortal like me. Only tell me how I can best serve you."

The storm which had long been in gathering, now burst upon them. The rocky cliffs protected them in some degree from the violence of the wind, but from the rain there was no escape.

"It is your right," said Vivienne, "to know by what strange chance I was brought to this pass."

"Do not try to tell me now," cried Victor. "I desire to hear nothing—I will hear nothing until I see you in a place of safety. Your feet are exposed to the wet ground, and even that thick cloak will soon be drenched with rain. Shall you be afraid to remain here alone until I can go back to the house for dry clothing?"

"I shall not be afraid to remain alone," said Vivienne, "but if others should come, I might be afraid of them." As she said this, she smiled faintly. "But you do not think of yourself. The coat which you gave me to stand upon must be wet through by this time."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Victor, as he picked up the garment and put it on. "It can hold only so much water, and it will be in no worse condition by the time I reach your home."

"You are more than kind to me, monsieur. You are merciless to yourself—you expose your life to save mine—you cover me with your garments while you are suffering. You, who are not used to this climate, can hardly expect to escape the effects of exposure to the damp and chill of such a storm. Ah! Never while memory lasts will the events of this night and your kindness be forgotten. Receive my soul's deep grati-

tude. If ever I become so ungrateful as to forget your merciful deeds this night, may Heaven punish me!"

She grasped both his hands, and would have fallen upon her knees before him if he had not prevented her.

"That vow is recorded in Heaven, and approved of saints. It was prompted, not by the poor service which I have been so happy in rendering, but by the transcendent impulse of a true, womanly heart. Say it once more—you will never forget me."

"I will never forget thee!"

"Now I may pour out my soul to thee, angel of goodness!" cried Victor. "I may tell thee how dearly I—but, no—we have not yet passed Heaven's portals—but it seemed for a moment that earth was receding and Paradise opening to my view. Pardon me, mademoiselle, but I begin to think that my brain has been affected by the events of the hour. We have no time to lose. The longer we remain here, the more uncomfortable will our situation become." He looked up at the rocky cliffs. "Ah! I see a wide cleft in the rocks. Perhaps it is large enough to shield you until my return. I will go and explore it."

"I will go with you," cried Vivienne.

He grasped his gun and led the way, she following. When Victor emerged from the cave, he said:

"How true it is that we often find bright spots when the way seems darkest."

"And you find one there?" she asked.

"Yes," said Victor, joyously. "This little cave is carpeted with the softest of green moss. How obliging Mother Nature is to her offspring. Now, give me your hand and I will place you in your eyrie."

When she was seated in the cave, Victor stood at the entrance, bowed low, and said:

"I present my homage to the Queen of the Mountains. I am going to leave my gun with you. If you should be in danger, can you use it?"

"All Corsican women understand the use of firearms. You are a sailor and, perhaps, a better marksman than I, but I doubt it. I always win the prize in shooting with my brothers."

"May Heaven preserve you until we meet again," were Victor's last words, and, a moment later, he was running at full speed towards Batistelli Castle.

As he plunged through the forest, occasionally catching his feet in the underbrush and nearly falling headlong, he congratulated himself upon having repressed an avowal of his love for Vivienne until a more opportune moment arrived. He would not have ventured to breathe his love for her, as she lay senseless in his arms, had it not been for an incident which had occurred the day previous. In company with Vivienne, he had walked down the wooded path until they came to the brook beside which she had knelt when she gave him the flower. As they stood there, the scene brought back to him the remembrance of his meeting with Count Mont d'Oro and he, unthinkingly, asked:

"Have you heard from Count Mont d'Oro, to-day, Mademoiselle Batistelli?"

"No. Why should I?" and she fixed her piercing black eyes upon him.

"Oh—I" he began—"I heard something soon after my arrival which made me think that you would be greatly interested in his condition."

"What did you hear? Please tell me."

Victor hesitated. Finally, he said: "Mademoiselle Batistelli, I am a British sailor. Perhaps you have heard that British sailors, as a class, are noted for their frankness and honesty. I will try to be worthy of their well-earned reputation."

He then told her what had happened after she gave him the white rose, and how Count Mont d'Oro had declared that she was to be the future Countess Mont

d'Oro, being already betrothed to him—but he did not refer to the duel.

"That betrothal," cried Vivienne, "was the foolish fancy of an old man who loved my father and who thought his son should love the daughter of the man whom he loved. On the other hand, my ambitious brother, Pascal, desires to join the two great landed estates and, at the same time, have his sister become a countess. But none of the four ever consulted my wish or will in the matter and, so far as I am concerned, I do not regard anything that has been said or done as at all binding upon me."

A strange thrill of delight had gone through Victor's nerves when he had heard this declaration, and he experienced it again as he threaded his way along the forest path. What he was doing was for Vivienne's sake—and she was free! If he could win her, there was no reason why she should not be his.

Pascal Batistelli was not at home when Victor arrived, and he was glad that he was not obliged to explain matters to Vivienne's brother. He found Snodine, the housekeeper, who speedily collected the articles of clothing that were needed, and he was soon on his way back to the cave in the cliff.

"I should not envy Count Mont d'Oro his feelings if he ever learns what has taken place on this eventful night," was Victor's mental reflection as he retraced his steps.

The Count was not to be envied. The doctor had told him that he would be confined to the house for at least three weeks, and it would be three more before he would be able to walk with his accustomed ease. One day, when Pascal Batistelli was speaking about his English guests, the Count asked, carelessly, as if their presence were of no particular interest to him:

"Who are they, Batistelli?"

"Admiral Enright, of the British navy, his daughter Helen, who is a very finely educated woman—and thero her attractions end—and a young lieutenant named Victor Duquesne, who may or may not be in love with the highly educated daughter."

The Count said nothing, but there was an expression upon his face which Pascal wrongly attributed to a sudden twinge of pain. It was a spasm of jealousy. So, his rival was a guest of the Batistellis and able to see Vivienne every day, while he was flat upon his back and could not interfere. He could do nothing himself—but something must be done. He sent for his friend Villefort, and gave him a large roll of gold coin and told him what to do.

In Villefort he had a willing slave, for the latter derived his living principally from Count Napier's bounty, but got nothing for which he had not rendered some service.

Shortly after Victor's departure the storm abated. Vivienne was very thankful for this, for she was really solicitous regarding his exposure to the elements. She knew that he was drenched to the skin and feared that this fact and the long walk to and from her home might throw him into a fever, for the river valleys in Corsica were, in those days, full of malarial poison. She was thinking of Victor, hoping that he would return soon, when she heard voices. She drew back as far as possible into the cave, but listened intently in order to hear every word that might be said.

Two men who, in appearance, resembled those belonging to Cromillan's band, but who, in reality, were not connected with it, approached from the same direction in which Victor had gone. As they came within hearing, Vivienne heard one of them say:

"Who in the devil left that lantern here?"

"Are you sure you saw the fellow?" the other asked.

"Yes, I am quite sure. He had a gun over his shoulder, but I saw no lantern. He wore a big cloak, however, and that may have concealed it from view."

"They are speaking of the Lieutenant," thought Vivienne, and she clasped her hands in mute terror.

"Shall we leave the lantern where it is?" asked the second man.

"Of course," was the reply; "if we move it, he will suspect that something is wrong."

"Don't you think we had better hide behind those trees?"

"No," said the first speaker; "we have come here to meet him, and he might as well meet us. He is somewhere about here. The lantern being here proves that, and we shall be sure of our chance sooner or later."

"What are we expected to do with this fellow, anyway?" asked the second speaker.

"Why, when we get him," said the other, "to carry out our agreement, we must get into a quarrel with him and dispose of him—that's all."

The shaft went home to Vivienne's heart. "They have come here to murder my friend in need," she said to herself. She sank upon her knees and raised her clasped hands. "Great God in Heaven, save him!" was her unspoken prayer. Could she do anything to avert the danger which threatened him? It was her duty, surely, to watch and listen.

"What's all the trouble about?" asked the second man.

"What usually causes trouble—a love affair."

"And the woman?"

"That Batistelli girl—Vivienne, I believe her name is. This young Englishman met her one day and she, fool-like, gave him a flower. The Count saw her do it, and asked the fellow to give it up. He refused and they

had it out with their fists, the Count getting the worst of it."

"Why didn't he use his stiletto?"

"He tried to, but the Englishman took it from him with one hand and knocked him down with the other."

"How do you happen to know so much?"

"Villefort told me all about it. The Count sent him with a challenge to the Englishman, who accepted it, and they fought it out with axes in the dark. The duel took place in an old shed, at midnight. Querer dogs, those Englishmen!"

"How did it end?"

"Neither one got cut. The Count fell through a hole in the floor and sprained his ankle. The Count's coachman got drunk and let out the whole story at the *cabaret*."

"Why doesn't the Count drop it, if he has had satisfaction?"

"But he isn't satisfied. He told Villefort that he accepted the Englishman's terms to please him; now, he is going to do something to please himself. The Count, naturally, would have waited until he was able to get out again, but it so happened that the Admiral and his daughter brought the young Englishman along with them to pay a visit to the Batistellis."

"That was too much for the Count," cried the second man, and he broke into a loud laugh.

"Shut up, you idiot!" said his companion. "Of course, the Count couldn't stand it, knowing that this young fellow was in the same house with the girl and nothing to do but make love to her. So he sent for Villefort, told him what he wanted done and gave him a big roll of louis d'or. Villefort, who is a bright man, decided that we were the fellows to do the job up in true Corsican fashion. We have got our money in advance, and all we have to do is to settle the Englishman as soon as we meet him."

Vivienne felt as though every drop of blood in her veins was turned to ice, while her head seemed ready to burst with the intense heat. She saw it all now—Count Mont d'Oro had hired these two bandits to pick a quarrel with Lieutenant Duquesne and kill him. How could she warn him? He had saved her life, for she surely would have died if she had remained all night exposed to the storm. The account should be balanced. It must stand, a life for a life. But how?

Vivienne was on the point of leaving her retreat and flying to warn Victor, but it was too late, for, as she stepped out upon the ledge, she heard his voice calling:

"Mademoiselle, are you there?"

"He has come!" cried one of the men. "I think your idea of getting out of sight for a while is a good one."

Suiting the action to the word, they hid themselves behind two of the largest trees.

Victor, with a bundle of clothing under his arm, made his way at once to the lantern, it being his idea to take it to the cave so that Vivienne could see what articles of clothing he had brought for her use, and it would also light them on their way home.

Vivienne called: "Victor! Victor!" softly, for she was afraid if the bandits knew they were discovered that she, too, would be killed, in which case Count Mont d'Oro and his hired assassins would escape the hand of justice. She would have given her own life to save Victor's, but, if that sacrifice was impossible, she determined to avenge his death.

As Victor stooped to pick up the lantern, a gruff voice said:

"Put that down! What are you going to do with my lantern?"

Victor looked up and saw two rough-looking fellows standing before him.

"I think you have made a mistake," he said. "I

happen to know that this lantern is the property of Monsieur Julien Batistelli. That is not your name, I am sure."

"Say, Jean," said one of the men to his companion, "you heard him say this isn't my lantern?"

"Of course it is," growled the other. "I have seen you with it a dozen times. Make him give it up."

"It will take more than two such fellows as you are to make me give it up," said Victor, defiantly.

The men drew their stilettos, the bright blades of the weapons flashing in the lantern-light.

Victor stepped back, suddenly realising that he was unarmed. He dropped the bundle of clothing and held up the lantern, which was his only means of defence, so that the light fell full upon the faces of his assailants, enabling him to see every motion made by them.

To Vivienne, the situation seemed tragical. She could stand the suspense no longer. Summoning all her strength, she raised to her shoulder the gun which Victor had given her, aimed it at the men, and discharged both barrels simultaneously. By a fortunate chance, her aim had been good. Standing so far above those at whom she fired, the effect of the shots was peculiar. One man received a bullet in his cheek which removed half a dozen of his teeth and a portion of his jawbone, passing out through his other cheek. The second man was less fortunate, for the bullet entered his throat, cutting a large artery and causing him to bleed profusely.

Victor realised that it was no time to attempt to learn the extent of his enemies' injuries. He rushed to the foot of the cliff, crying:

"Come, Vivienne!"

She passed the gun down to him, and then stood irresolute.

"Jump!" he cried.

She instantly threw herself from the cliff, some ten

feet above him, and was caught in his powerful arms. He had braced himself for the shock and, although he was forced backwards, he did not fall, nor did he loosen his hold upon her until he had placed her safely upon the ground.

He looked backward and found that his assailants had taken to the woods, probably fearing that the gun would be reloaded and used to their further detriment. He passed the gun to Vivienne, considering it the easiest article for her to carry, encumbered as she was by the great cloak. He then returned to where he had left the bundle of clothing and the lantern and regained possession of them.

When he rejoined Vivienne, he said: "I dare not stop to have you put on your dry clothing here. I do not know how badly those fellows are injured, and they may follow us. We will go a short distance and look for some place where we can secrete ourselves. I will then reload the gun and you can put on your boots, which you need more than anything else. The storm has ceased and perhaps you can reach home without stopping to change your clothing."

There was little danger of their being overtaken. One of the assassins was likely to die from loss of blood, while the other was suffering so acutely on account of his broken jaw that he could be of little service to his companion.

The travellers reached home without experiencing any other thrilling adventures. Fortunately, Pascal had not yet returned. Vivienne made her way at once to the housekeeper's room, where she put on the dry clothing which had been sent to her. Snodine was full of curiosity, which Vivienne satisfied by telling her as little as possible. The next day, she repeated to Victor enough of what his assailants had said to prove to him that, in his list of enemies, he must include, not only the Batistelli brothers and their adherents, but also Count Mont d'Oro and his hired minions.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

WHILE Victor and Vivienne were participants in the exciting events which took place in the *maquis*, Bertha Renville was seated in the cosy little room which had been assigned to her, and in which she had passed many happy hours. She derived much pleasure from the thought that Jack was on the way. She had caught Count Mont d'Oro in one falsehood and did not believe his statement that her guardian, Thomas Glynn, was in Corsica. Since the Count's accident, the real cause of which was unknown to her, for he had told a plausible story of missing his footing when stepping from his carriage, both the Countess and Bertha had passed an hour each day with him; for what woman is there who does not have some compassion for so helpless and harmless a creature as a man with a sprained ankle?

Vivienne had not felt inclined to make a *confidante* of Snodine, for she knew that she was a great gossip, and that what she told her would be retold the next day with many fanciful additions to the other servants. But Vivienne could place implicit trust in her old nurse, Clarine; so, the next morning, she went to her room, determined to confide in her and to ask her what could be done, if anything, to induce Julien to give up his evil ways.

She was obliged to postpone her disclosures, however, to a more opportune time, for Old Manassa had made an early morning call on Clarine and, according to his usual custom, had fallen asleep in the easy-chair



OLD MANASSA



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which he considered his personal property when he paid a visit to the old nurse. His head had fallen forward and his wrinkled hands were clasped tightly over the huge head of the big oaken staff which was his constant companion. He declared that he was a hundred years old, and there was no one to gainsay his claim to that advanced age. He had, upon several occasions, when supposed to be asleep, evinced a comprehension of, and a marked interest in, the conversation which was going on about him. For that reason, Vivienne thought it best to put off giving Clarine an account of her adventures until she could speak to her alone.

Clarine, however, had something to say to Vivienne, being apparently unmindful of the presence of Old Manassa, or willing to have him hear what she said.

"Do you know," asked Clarine, "that in two weeks you will be eighteen years old?"

"I really had not thought of it," Vivienne replied. "My birthdays have never been occasions of particular enjoyment to me."

"But this one will be," cried Clarine. "You will not be a young girl then, but a woman, and such events are always celebrated in Corsica, and also, I have heard, in other parts of the world. Yes," the old nurse repeated, "in two weeks you will be eighteen years old."

"How old are you, Clarine?" asked Vivienne.

"Manassa says his mother told him that he was four years old when I was born. If his memory can be depended upon, I am ninety-six. How well I remember the day your grandfather brought me to the castle! I came to nurse your grandame. Your dear sainted mother was but two weeks old when I first saw her sweet face. How swiftly the time has sped, and you, the little weeny baby which she laid in my arms eighteen years ago, have been spared to bless my old age. God is good! Yes—yes."

"Oh, Clarine, you have acted a mother's part to

us all. We can never repay you but by loving you dearly, as we do."

"I know you do, child. I know it. But how vividly the old times come back to me to-day. For Old Manassa there once asked me to be his wife, but I had no heart to give. It was buried, years ago, in the grave of my husband."

"Dear Clarine, is love so tenacious as to wed a living heart to the tomb?"

"Not all hearts, dear, but mine could never love again."

"I suppose the times and the people have changed much since you were a girl, Clarine."

"Ah, yes, child," said the nurse. "The people most of all. I remember when this castle was a fortress for hundreds of brave warriors and, too, when poor refugees sought safety within its strong walls. Ah, me, those were dreadful times. I have seen a hundred soldiers upon the ramparts, firing upon our enemies, and many a prisoner has ended his life in the tower dungeon."

"The dungeon! I never knew there was one. Do my brothers know about it?"

"No human being but myself knows. Even Old Manassa there is ignorant of its existence. To my hands alone was intrusted the duty of carrying food to the poor prisoners confined there, who were destined never more to see the light of day."

"Oh, Clarine, can this be true!" Vivienne cried. "You did but dream it. You sometimes have bad dreams, you know, when you are not well."

"Ah, child, you will soon know whether it be a dream. Now, listen to me, darling; don't lose a word I say, for I am about to impart a message from the dead."

"What? From the dead?"

"Yes, from your dead father. He called me into the library two hours before he went out for the last time alive. He shut the door, took my hand in his, and

made me promise that upon your eighteenth birthday I would impart to you a knowledge of the existence of the dungeon, and also give you a paper of written instructions, telling you how to open its great door—a door which can never be unfastened but by one possessing the secret of its complicated springs and bars.”

“But why did my father desire this secret to be divulged to me alone? Why not to my brothers as well?”

“He thought, no doubt, that they might, in some emergency, make bad use of such knowledge. He knew not how headstrong they might become, or how fiery their passions might be when they reached manhood. He had come to abhor the spirit of revenge and murder which pervades our country. I will repeat to you his very words: ‘My daughter’s gentle heart will understand my motives when you say to her from me: Never open that door except in case of great extremity, and never reveal the secret to any living being unless it be to save human life!’”

“To what extremity could I ever be driven which would oblige me to open that terrible door? I shudder to think of it, Clarine.”

“Heaven knows, child—we do not. But I believe such a time will come.”

“What makes you think so? What good reason can you give?”

“Your father had a presentiment that he would die a violent death when he was a comparatively young man, and he told me that when the door was opened by your hand, he would be there to meet you.”

“Ah, Clarine, I think it is superstition rather than reason that leads you to think as you do. I never saw my dear father, nor my mother to know her, but my father’s words are sacred to me and I will be true to the trust that he has confided to me.”

“You had a noble father and a beautiful mother. He was brutally murdered by an assassin. When your

poor mother heard the news, just after you were born, she went out of her mind, and a few days later we laid her beside the one whom she had loved so well. Their blood cried aloud for vengeance, but the murderer was a coward. He ran away from Corsica and the curse of *Rimbecco* still rests upon our family. But come, child, we have talked enough about such matters. Let us go into the garden and the bright sunshine will drive away unhappy memories."

When they had gone, Manassa opened his eyes, then, raising his oaken staff, brought it down upon the floor with all the strength he possessed.

"They say women cannot keep a secret, but Clarine has kept that one for nearly eighteen years. She would have made a good wife, but she wouldn't have me, although I was only seventy-five when I proposed to her. I think I know where that dungeon is and I will find out how to open the door. But when I shut it, I hope that Manuel Della Corsica and his son Vandemar will be on the inside. When they are, I shall never try to open the door. No, I will let them starve and die there—then no one can say *Rimbecco* to the Batistellis, or to their servants who love them and will ever be faithful to them."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD.

No two individuals could be more dissimilar as regards the essentials which enter into the composition of human character, than Helen Enright and Vivienne Batistelli. Helen's education had been devoted chiefly to the head, with but little attention to the finer sensibilities, and virtually none at all to the passions of the heart. Mrs. Inchbald and Mary Wollstonecraft had not voiced the rights, or rather the wrongs, of women, so that her education was the result of an individual inspiration instead of proceeding from a preconcerted and combined movement on the part of her sex. She was fortunate in having a father who loved her so well that he pushed aside the conventionalities of the time and allowed his daughter to have her own sweet will in everything which did not interfere with his personal comfort.

When he fully realised the extent of her acquirements, he became intensely proud of her; but his praises in those days were more calculated to drive away suitors than to attract them, for by the men of that time a highly educated woman was looked upon as one to be avoided and not likely to make, what Englishmen most desire, an obedient wife.

On the other hand, Vivienne's education had been almost wholly of the heart. She could read and write the French language quite well and had also acquired a fair knowledge of the English. If her father and mother had lived, she would, no doubt, have been sent to France to receive fuller instruction, but when she

arrived at the age of sixteen, she became, by her brother Pascal's wish, and with no opposition on her part, mistress of the house; always subject, of course, in important matters, to the will of her elder brother, who was master in all things.

Left fatherless and motherless within a few days of her birth, the little Vivienne had grown up under the care of Clarine, her nurse, who had been in the service of the Batistelli family since her mother had been an infant. Stories about fairies, the folklore of the country, and tales of bloody vendettas, had been poured into the child's ears by Clarine and Manassa. In this way her perceptive powers and sensibilities were dominated by the physical rather than the mental. She had led a retired life, for her brother Pascal was not social in his nature. Julien was too much so, but his associates were never welcome to the hospitalities of the house. If it had not been for the agreement, or rather understanding, between the old Count Mont d'Oro and Pascal's father, regarding the marriage of Napier and Vivienne, the young girl would have grown up fancy-free, so far as love of man was concerned—meaning, of course, any particular man.

As Vivienne, although she avoided argument upon the subject with her brother, had given the young Count Mont d'Oro no encouragement in his suit, having met all his advances with mock disdain or cool rebuff—and as Helen Enright's heart had been regarded as unsailable—the young god Cupid and his dangerous arrows never formed the subject of conversation between the two young ladies. Helen told Vivienne about England, its king and princes, its nobility and gentry. Despite the English girl's graphic description of England's greatness and glory, the young Corsican girl failed to gain an adequate conception of the scenes described to her; but when her turn came to speak, when she talked of Corsica, its traditions, its customs, and its people, the

English girl fully understood and made copious entries in the journal which she had kept since her departure from England.

The two girls were naturally thrown into daily companionship. Like all Englishwomen, Helen was fond of outdoor life, and a great lover of the beauties of nature. Vivienne would have remained within doors, but Helen induced her to accompany her in daily rambles, during which every part of the extensive grounds surrounding the Batistelli mansion was visited, and many excursions were made into the surrounding *maquis*, although Pascal, upon one occasion, said he felt it was his duty to warn Miss Enright, being a stranger, that she ran the risk of being captured by banditti, carried off into the mountains, and held for a large ransom.

One day they were walking in the grounds when Helen espied a path which, it occurred to her, had not yet been travelled. It was very short, not more than thirty feet in length, and seemed to end in a mass of dense foliage. When this was reached, however, a narrower path leading to the left was disclosed which, when followed, brought them to the foot of a great oak tree. Helen had previously seen and admired this tree and spoken of it to Vivienne, but as the latter had made no comment, Helen supposed that it was inaccessible.

"And does this grand old tree stand upon your estate?" asked Helen.

"Yes," was the reply, "and they say, I do not know with how much truth, that it is three hundred years old. It is called The Tree of the Vendetta. Clarine says her mother told her that a terrible feud existed between two Corsican families, each of which, it so happened, had six grown-up sons. The father of one of the families killed the father of the other. The sons of the latter, with other relatives, at night attacked the

house in which the father and his six sons lived and set it on fire, and as their enemies ran out to escape the flames and smoke, shot them down, the bright light of the fire exposing them to the shots of their adversaries, who were in the shadows, or concealed behind trees."

"Oh, what barbarism!" ejaculated Helen.

"It is the custom of the country," Vivienne remarked, and there was a coolness in her tone which did not escape her companion's notice. For several minutes neither spoke. Then Helen asked:

"But how did the tree get its name? Was it close to the house?"

"More barbarism followed," Vivienne replied, with a touch of sarcasm. "As the family was virtually extinct, the victors buried them at the foot of this tree. You see, we do not print history in this country, but we remember it."

"I hope with all my heart," said Helen, "that you have no such memories connected with the past."

"There you are wrong," cried Vivienne, and her voice, which up to this time had been subdued, now became strong and impassioned. "I have a sad memory and, as what I have said to you may cause you to misunderstand my true feeling, I will tell you all. The very day that I was born my father became the victim of an assassin. My brothers tell me that my father had no quarrel with the man who murdered him and he must have been hired by some one to do the cruel deed. He was a coward, for that very night he took his only child, a little boy six years old, and fled from the country, so that my brothers are deprived of the opportunity of avenging the death of our father. There are none who dare to say *Rimbecco* to my brothers, but many think it in their hearts."

"*Rimbecco!*" cried Helen. "What does that mean?"

"*Rimbecco*," explained Vivienne, "is a reproachful

word spoken to a member of a Corsican family by another member of the family, or one of its adherents, because the assassination of a relative has not been followed, within a reasonable time, by the killing of the assassin or some member of his family. *Rimbecco* is the worst taunt that can be thrown in the face of a Corsican, for it is considered as declaring him to be even baser than a coward. If Manuel Della Coscia, who murdered my father, and his son Vandemar, who must now be twenty-four years of age, are still living, they must remain exiles or return to Corsica and answer with their lives for the great crime which has been committed."

"But you who are so kind to the unfortunate, so good to all, can you not avert the doom which threatens an innocent victim? Young Vandemar, the last of his race, is surely guiltless. Is it just that he should suffer death for no fault of his own?"

"Men are killed in war for no fault of their own," said Vivienne.

"Alas, yes," replied Helen, "but that is unavoidable. Suppose that, instead of your father becoming the victim, he had killed his assailant?"

Vivienne responded quickly: "It would then rest with his son, now that he has grown to manhood, to avenge his father by killing my brothers."

"Oh, tell me," cried Helen, "that you do not favour this cruel, wicked custom! Tell me, dear friend, that you abhor it as I do!"

"I regret the necessity," Vivienne replied.

"And according to the custom of your country, your elder brother must commit this terrible deed?"

"He must."

"But if he dies before accomplishing it?" asked Helen.

"It will then devolve upon my younger brother, Julien."

"And in case he dies?" was Helen's next inquiry.

"It will then devolve upon——"

"No, no, no. Do not speak, Vivienne! I cannot bear it! You do not mean it. Oh, tell me that I am dreaming—that you did not mean to say——"

"If both should die and I should live," cried Vivienne, excitedly, "it would be my duty to avenge my father's death, or his blood would be upon my own hands. Manuel Della Coscia and his son Vandemar are enemies of my family, and if no other hand can do it, mine must send the bullet or handle the stiletto."

Count Mont d'Oro had so far recovered from his injury that he was able to get about with the help of a couple of walking-sticks. His progress was necessarily slow and any little inadvertence caused him severe pain. On such occasions, his thoughts naturally reverted to his antagonist. He had heard from Villefort of the ill-success of his scheme to entrap Victor, and of the terrible fate of the would-be murderers, both of whom had been found dead in the *maquis*.

As soon as the Count acquired a limited degree of locomotion, he made his way to the stables, ordered the carriage, and was driven at once to the hotel in Ajaccio. A messenger was despatched in search of Villefort, whose headquarters were at a *cabaret* kept by Angelo Barbera.

Villefort came at once in response to the summons, and was soon closeted with the Count.

"That young devil of an Englishman has a charmed life," said Villefort.

"Perhaps so," the Count replied, "but you know there is an old saying that the third time never fails. In order that the saying may not be disproved, we must make sure of our game this time."

Wine and cigars were ordered, and the two worthies cudgelled their brains to think of some plan by which

Victor might be put in their power. How he could be summarily disposed of was a matter which must be decided later.

Villefort looked up suddenly and asked:

"What was the name of the man who killed Pascal Batistelli's father?"

The Count replied: "Manuel Della Coscia—his son's name was Vandemar."

"Then the son's initials would be V. D. C., would they not?"

"Certainly, but what are you looking at so intently?"

"By Saint Christopher!" cried Villefort, "but this is strange!"

"What is strange? Speak up and don't sit there with your mouth open like a stuck pig."

"Spare me your compliments," said Villefort, "or I may be forced to demand an apology."

The Count laughed. "Pardon me, Villefort, but the jolting of that clumsy carriage over that infernally rough road has filled my foot with a dozen toothaches. But what have you found?"

"They may mean something or nothing, but here, cut in the table, and the cuts are fresh ones, are the initials V. D. C. They are a clue to something—but what?"

"Go downstairs," said the Count, "and find out who last occupied this room."

In a short time Villefort returned with the information that the room had not been occupied since the young gentleman who was in the company of the English admiral had left it.

"So our man put up here," said the Count. "But why V. D. C.?"

"Perhaps his name is spelled D-u C-a-i-n," suggested Villefort.

"Guessing won't hit the mark," the Count cried. "Have you no wits? Five louis d'or if you prove that

Vandemar Della Coscia and the Englishman are one and the same person! Think of something. Use the carriage if you need it. Come back in an hour. I am going to lie down and rest to see if I can get rid of this damnable torture. If he had given me a cut with his axe, it would have healed long ago."

Villefort did not take the carriage, but walked slowly along the main street, wondering how he could earn the promised reward.

"The price offered is very small," he soliloquised, "but if I succeed, I shall make bold to suggest to the Count that he double it."

He stopped short and looked across the street. Right opposite stood Barbera's *cabaret*. A thought occurred to him. He entered the place, and beckoning to the proprietor, they went upstairs to the latter's room.

"Do you want to make a louis d'or, Barbera?"

"I could make a good many if that English admiral would let his sailors come ashore."

"Well, if you wish to earn from me what you can't earn from the sailors, sit down here and write a letter which I will dictate to you."

Villefort began:

"Monsieur Angelo Barbera solicits an immediate visit. He has learned of a plot against your life, but prefers to disclose particulars to you in person. Mention this matter to no one. Bring this letter with you for identification."

"Now fold it up and seal it," said Villefort.

"To whom shall I address it?" asked Barbera.

"I will attend to that," said Villefort. "Give me the letter."

"Where is my louis d'or?"

"You shall have it within an hour," said Villefort.

"I will tell you what I have been up to when I come back."

He snatched the letter from Barbera's hand, ran

down-stairs and made his way quickly to the quay. He engaged a boat and soon reached the gangway of the *Osprey*, where he was met by the marine on guard.

"My friend, the Count Mont d'Oro, is acquainted with the Lieutenant who is with your admiral on shore. He has purchased for him a present of silver, of which he intends to make me the bearer, sending with it this letter. He knows that the Lieutenant's name is Victor Duquesne, but he has thought that perhaps the young gentleman has another name besides Victor, and, to speak frankly, the Count does not know exactly how to spell his name."

"You have come to the right man, sir," said the marine. "I received word at Malta that my poor old mother was dead; that she had been buried in God's Acre, and that she would have to remain there unless I sent home some money to have her laid beside my father in the village burying-ground. I told the Lieutenant that I had drank and gambled away all my money at Malta and he very kindly started a subscription for me, leading the paper with a pound. I remember that I asked him if the name he had written was his full name, and he said—yes. I have the paper in my pocket now."

Villefort examined it carefully. "Victor Duquesne," was what he saw.

"A thousand thanks," said he, as he returned the paper, at the same time giving the man a silver coin. "Oblige me, and my friend the Count, by saying nothing about this to Lieutenant Duquesne. The Count is greatly mortified at being obliged to discover his friend's real name in such a roundabout way, and it would add to his chagrin if the Lieutenant should hear about it."

"I understand," said the man. "If a piece of silver is big enough, it always closes my mouth."

An hour had hardly elapsed before Villefort reported his finding to the Count.

"I beg your pardon, Count, but in order to secure this valuable information, which I think must convince you that Vandemar Della Coscia is in Corsica, and a guest——"

"What are you begging my pardon for, Villefort? I can imagine as well as you can. What did you do to obtain this supposed valuable information?" and the Count's voice had a marked tinge of sarcasm in it.

"I have promised to pay a louis d'or for valuable assistance."

"Well, there are your louis d'or," said the Count. "I did not promise to pay for assistance. Come, help me down to the carriage. I must get home, for my foot aches worse than ever."

As they neared the *cabaret*, the Count said: "Villefort, have Barbera send me out some brandy."

Villefort gave the order and placed the louis d'or in Barbera's hand, saying at the same time, as he handed back the letter:

"I could not use it. The bird had flown. Tear it up, and may you always earn a louis d'or as easily."

The Count swallowed half a tumblerful of brandy at a gulp. As they rode on he said to himself: "What a fine piece of news it will be for Pascal Batistelli when I tell him that his guest, the English lieutenant, is the son of the man who murdered his father. But he shall never know it until his sister is my wife. She hates me, but I will make her suffer for it. If she loved me, she might marry whom she chose."

Countess Mont d'Oro and Bertha had been greatly pleased when the young Count became convalescent and was able to leave his room.

"I hope," said the Countess, "that Napier will soon long for the artificial delights of Paris and leave us alone to enjoy the natural beauties of Corsica. I had intended to take you with me to visit many of my old friends, but for this unfortunate and unforeseen acci-

dent. However, we shall begin our round of gaiety shortly, for I have to-day received invitations for you and me to attend the party to be given in honour of Mademoiselle Vivienne Batistelli, who will soon reach her eighteenth birthday."

CHAPTER XX.

“WHO IS MASTER HERE?”

AT the Count's request, Villefort accompanied him home and assisted him to his room. The Count's next desire was that he would summon the physician who was attendant upon him, and Villefort complied, inwardly grumbling because the carriage was not placed at his service. The doctor was out and not expected to return for a couple of hours. Ordinarily, under such circumstances, he would have gone back to the Count and have informed him of the prospective delay.

He took out the four louis d'or and looked at them:

“How cursed mean to make me pay Barbera! I expected at least ten louis d'or for myself besides the one for expenses. I have always said that if he played me a mean trick, I would drop him. He has never half paid me for what I have done.”

Thus soliloquising, he walked on until he once more reached the *cabaret*. Again he beckoned to Barbera to follow him to the private room.

“I have an explanation to make to you,” said Villefort.

“I think it is about time,” exclaimed Barbera. “What in the devil did you get me to write such a letter for, then bring it back and tell me to tear it up? I thought you had something on hand that would pay us both well.”

“That's what I'm going to explain,” said Villefort. “Order up a bottle of wine. I'm cursed thirsty, for I have been walking an hour over dusty roads, and I get nothing for my time or trouble.”

"I thought Monsieur Villefort was too sharp-witted, and his services too valuable, to long serve a poor paymaster."

"I am done with him!" cried Villefort with sudden determination, and, as he spoke, he brought his wine-glass down upon the table with such force as to break it into fragments.

"Well spoken, Villefort!" cried Barbera. "You are too smart a man to play second fiddle always."

"I'm coming to think so myself," said Villefort. "Let me explain. I am going to tell you the whole story, but you must keep your mouth shut."

"If I told all I knew," said Barbera, "there would be many more widows in Ajaccio than there are now. But go on."

"Well, the fact is," began Villefort, "Vandemar Della Coscia is in Corsica."

"I don't believe it!" cried Barbera.

"I know it," said Villefort, "so we won't argue the matter. That young Englishman whom they call Victor Duquesne is really Vandemar Della Coscia in disguise. You know all about the duel between Count Mont d'Oro and the Englishman, so I won't go over that again. You have heard, I suppose, that Paoli Tarenti and Giuseppe Mondolo were found dead in the woods."

"Yes!" cried Barbera. "Do you know who killed them?"

"Yes, and I am going to tell you. I got Paoli and his friend to pick a quarrel with the Englishman and finish him before it was over."

"What did you have against him?" asked Barbera.

"Nothing, but Count Mont d'Oro wished to get him out of the way and I did what I could to help him."

"For a consideration, of course," said Barbera, smiling.

"And a mighty poor one, too," said Villefort. "Only five poor little louis d'or, and I gave you one for writing that letter."

"That letter is what I wish to know about," rejoined Barbera.

Villefort then told how the initials "V. D. C." were found cut into the table, and how it had occurred to both the Count and himself that the supposed Englishman was in reality a Corsican.

"The Count wished me to find out whether the Lieutenant had a middle name. When I came to you and asked you to write the letter, my idea was to have the Englishman drugged, then send for the Count, and let him settle the matter in his own way. On my way to the English frigate, it occurred to me that I was getting too deeply compromised, with no promise of reward, and, especially, nothing in advance. You see, I asked the hotel keeper who had last occupied the room, and found it was the Englishman; then I asked you to write the letter, and, besides, whoever I met at the vessel would surely remember me. I knew the Count wouldn't give his life to save mine and I didn't propose to give mine for nothing. So I managed the affair in another way, found out all that I wished to know, and that's why I told you to destroy the letter."

"Well!" cried Barbera, "I wouldn't have done that job under twenty-five louis!"

"I got five and had to pay you one out of it, and that's why I'm through with Count Mont d'Oro. I can stand anything in a man but meanness. I'll make him pay dearly for that louis d'or—damn me if I don't."

After Villefort left the *cabaret* his copious draughts of wine began to take effect.

"How shall I get even with him? By St. Christopher! I have it. He will tell Pascal Batistelli and the old vendetta will be revived. There is one man in

Corsica who is bound to put down the vendetta. They call him Cromillian, the moral bandit. I will go and see him. There'll be no money in it, but revenge is sweet, and Count Mont d'Oro and his friend Pascal will find themselves deprived of their victim."

As the anniversary of her birthday approached, Vivienne spent the greater part of her time with her old nurse, Clarine. Rendered motherless, as she had been when only a few days old, Clarine had been both nurse and mother to her, and it was only natural that she should pour into the ear of her only *confidante* those troubles and secrets which a young girl usually makes known to her mother alone.

One morning she sat talking to Clarine, the coming birthday party being the subject under consideration. As was his habit of late, Old Manassa was apparently asleep in his arm-chair, but still half conscious of what was going on. The conversation between Vivienne and her old nurse was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Pascal, who, paying no attention to the other occupants of the room, approached Vivienne and asked, abruptly:

"Have you sent out all your invitations for the party?"

Vivienne looked up inquiringly and answered: "Yes."

"That is strange," said her brother; "I saw Count Mont d'Oro this morning and he told me that he had not received one."

"I did not desire his company," Vivienne replied, "and, therefore, did not invite him. I have asked the Countess his mother, and Miss Renville, and that ought to satisfy you."

But Pascal was not satisfied. He had met the Count that morning, who had told him that he had a most important secret to communicate, but that it would not

be proper to tell it until his sister Vivienne had become Countess Mont d'Oro. He had added:

"Vivienne will be a woman in a few days. Why not have the wedding occur within a week thereafter and end all this nonsense?"

The Count then remarked that he had not received an invitation to the birthday party.

Again turning to his sister, Pascal said: "I presume that you have invited Lieutenant Duquesne."

"How could I omit him," asked Vivienne, "when he is our own guest?"

"I invited him," said Pascal, "out of compliment to the Admiral, but did not suppose that he would accept, nor would he have done so if he had not met you that day in the garden."

"I am ashamed of you, Pascal," cried Vivienne. "You have no right to speak to me in that way, even if you are my brother. You have no right to assume that Lieutenant Duquesne and I are anything more to each other than acquaintances—no, that is not quite honest—I mean good friends."

"If you do not invite Count Mont d'Oro," said Pascal, "I shall. But, considering their enmity to each other, it would be the height of incivility to ask both the Count and the Lieutenant. I will tell the Englishman that his invitation has expired by limitation, or better still, I will ask the Admiral to send him back to his ship."

"I have invited Admiral Enright and his daughter. It would be the height of incivility, as you term it, not to ask Lieutenant Duquesne. You can tell both the Count and Lieutenant Duquesne that the other is coming and, if they do not wish to meet, both can stay away."

"Is that the proper way for a young lady to treat her betrothed lover?" asked Pascal, indignantly.

"Pascal, you have no right to dispose of my hand

without consulting my wishes, and I will not submit to it. I do not love the Count and I will not marry him."

"No, no!" cried Clarine. "She shall not be compelled to marry a man whom she does not love."

The interposition of Vivienne's ally raised Pascal's latent anger to a high pitch.

"Clarine," he cried, "I command you not to meddle with matters which do not concern you! I act in her father's stead, and it is my right and my duty to see her properly married and settled in life. For that reason, I have decided that Count Mont d'Oro shall be a guest, but I will not allow Lieutenant Duquesne to be present."

"You have no right, Pascal," cried Vivienne, "to take such a course."

She raised her voice and cried, with all the decision of her impetuous nature:

"I say that Lieutenant Duquesne shall come!"

"And I say he shall not!" thundered Pascal.

Old Manassa, awakened by the loud voices, started to his feet.

"What is the matter, Clarine?" he cried. "What is all this loud talk about?"

"Why," said Clarine, "Vivienne has asked Lieutenant Duquesne to come to her birthday party and Pascal says that he shall not."

"But I say he shall come!" cried Manassa, and he brought down his heavy staff with a loud whack on the floor.

"Don't cry, little girl." Hobbling up to Pascal, he shook his staff in his face and exclaimed with more vehemence than before:

"I say he shall come! Do you hear me, young man? Do you hear me, sir?"

Pascal saw that numerically the odds were against him, for they stood three to one. He knew from past

experience that, if goaded on, he would grow more and more intemperate in his language. He would reply to him with dignity and keep his temper:

"You forget yourself, Manassa. I am master here."

"You master here!" shouted Manassa. "Then who am I? Who am I, sir?"

Clarine interposed: "You are only a servant, Manassa."

"Am I a servant, Clarine? That boy is getting impudent, extremely impudent! I must bring him down a bit." He shook his staff in Pascal's face, again saying:

"I say he shall come. Do you hear?"

"There, there," said Clarine, soothingly, "you are too old to get angry. A man a hundred years old ought to know better."

"Old, hey! What if I am a hundred years old? Every day I live I learn something new. Who is this man that Vivienne wants to come to the party? Is he a Corsican?"

"No," said Clarine, "he is a stranger—an Englishman—a sailor."

"A sailor! They are good, true men. Speaking of sailors, I remember that soon after Manuel Della Coscia, the murderer and coward, ran away from Corsica, taking his son with him, I had a dream. I thought that the vessel in which he sailed, while on its way to Marseilles, was becalmed, and as it drifted there, helplessly, the devil came up out of the sea and, grasping the old Della Coscia and the young one, dragged them down with him—and I have liked the devil a little ever since."

Even Pascal could not help smiling at this exhibition of devotion on the part of an old servant, but he did not propose to be further humiliated.

"Manassa," he said, sternly, "we have had enough of this. Go to your own room."

The old man grew still more incensed. "You talk as though you were my master," he cried, "but you are not. I am master here. How dare you vex your sister? I say he shall come!"

Pascal's anger rose again: "If you do not leave the room, I will put you out."

"How can you speak so," cried Vivienne, "to a weak, foolish old man?"

Manassa's temper was equal to his age. "Hear him order me about, Clarine! Is he my master? The little good-for-nothing! Say, Clarine, is he my master?"

"Oh, Manassa, how forgetful you are getting to be! You know you were valet to Joseph, who had a son Conrad. This is Conrad's son."

Pascal was weary of the fruitless discussion. Why continue it? He had declared his intention of inviting Count Mont d'Oro and of requesting Lieutenant Duquesne to leave the house, and that settled the matter. Without replying to Manassa, he withdrew and proceeded to his library.

Manassa went on, apparently regardless of Pascal's departure:

"Yes, I was Joseph's valet. I remember now, and was I not Lady Julie's valet?"

Clarine laughed. "Why, of course not. But you used sometimes to drive her out when the coachman was sick. How you do forget!"

"Well, whose valet am I now, Clarine?"

"You are nobody's valet."

"Is Pascal my valet?"

"No, no, Manassa! There now, don't ask any more questions."

"I do not wish to ask any more. I have heard all that I care to. I am going into the garden to take a walk. Run into my room, Clarine, and get me my other cane. It is not proper that the master of the

house should walk out with an old stick like this," and he threw his oaken staff upon the floor.

"Do hear the man talk," said Clarine—"as if I could run."

"I will go," said Vivienne. "Sit still, Clarine."

When Vivienne had gone, Manassa said: "How tall she is! How she has grown! She is almost as tall as Susette."

"Why, Manassa, I haven't heard you speak Susette's name in ever so long," said Clarine.

Manassa chuckled. "Do you remember, Clarine, the minuet we had that night over in the new barn at Prospero Point? My stars, how Susette did throw those black eyes at me that evening! I really do believe that the girl loved me, Clarine. Now, don't you think she did?"

Clarine placed her hand upon Manassa's arm. "Why, to be sure, else why did she marry you? For mercy's sake! You can't have forgotten that Susette Cornelli became your wife!"

Manassa rubbed his forehead meditatively. "So she did! Why, really, so she did. Poor Susette, she's dead. Have I got a wife now, Clarine?"

"It beats all how you do forget. No, no, of course you have no wife, and are not likely to have any. You would not think of marrying at your age, I hope."

"So you think I am too old to have a wife. Well, I will have a wife if I want one. Do you hear? I will have one! You are very impudent for a servant. I will have one if I want to! You are nothing but an old woman. What do you know about a gentleman's affairs? Wasn't I bodyguard to Conrad, Pascal's father?"

"You mean Pascal's grandfather, Joseph. How you do get things mixed up!"

"Here is your cane, Manassa," said Vivienne, softly. The old man took it, forgetting to thank her for

her kindness, and stamped across the floor to the door which led to the garden. With his hand upon the latch, he turned, and casting a spiteful glance upon Clarine, ejaculated:

"I will have a wife if I want one!"

Then he went out, slamming the door viciously.

Pascal made his way to the library, with the firm intention of sending an invitation to Count Napier Mont d'Oro to become one of the guests at the birthday party. He had hardly completed his self-appointed task when Adolphe entered and informed him that a shepherd boy wished to see him.

"Who is he?" asked Pascal.

"I never saw him before," Adolphe replied. "I think he has a letter for you."

A few minutes later the boy entered. "I have a letter for Pascal Batistelli," he said.

Pascal reached out his hand to receive it.

"I was to put it into the hands of Pascal Batistelli. Are you the right man?"

"That is my name," said Pascal.

The boy handed him the letter and then retreated slowly towards the door. Pascal threw him a small coin, which the boy deftly caught, and then quickly withdrew. Pascal broke the seal and read:

"I cannot give you my real name in this note, for reasons which you will understand. I have found the man you seek. This is all I can tell you until some arrangements are made in relation to the reward offered. I am playing false to a friend in order to serve you—a friend who will fight for Vandemar to the death. I am obliged to act, therefore, with the utmost caution. I will meet you to-morrow night at twelve, precisely, in the maple grove behind the castle."

"I understand," said Pascal, as he laid down the letter. "This must come from the man who called

himself Paoli, and who said that he belonged to Cromillian's band. To serve me he must prove false to a friend. That friend, I suppose, is Cromillian, and, reading between the lines, I infer that Cromillian is a friend of Vandemar Della Coscia. So be it. The Batistellis have friends, also, and we shall soon learn which is the stronger party."

At that moment Julien entered the room.

"Read that, Julien," said Pascal, as he handed him the letter.

Julien grasped it, and seating himself near his brother, read it aloud, Pascal several times cautioning him to lower his voice. When Julien finished reading he jumped to his feet and exclaimed excitedly:

"At last! At last!! The hour of vengeance is near! If we find this man Vandemar, it should not take us long to avenge the murder of our father; then our sister will never again be able to reproach us with cowardice or wilful delay."

"Be not over-confident, Julien. You know how sanguine we were when we sent Alberto Cordoni to England in search of some trace of Manuel Della Coscia, and you know what a large sum that effort cost us, and all for nothing. We were duped by Cordoni! This may be nothing but a plot to capture the reward. We must be on our guard!"

"But you will meet this man?" queried Julien.

"Certainly," said his brother, "and you shall go with me. If he does what he says he can, I shall have to pay him a hundred louis d'or, but that is little for so much."

Pascal changed the subject abruptly: "Julien, I have a favour to ask of you. Will you deliver this letter into the hands of Count Mont d'Oro?"

"Why, of course," said Julien, taking up the letter.

"But I hope you have not invited him to the party. Vivienne told me that she had not sent him an invita-

tion. She doesn't like him, and if he comes she will be unhappy."

"Thank you for your advice," said Pascal, coldly. "I never afflict her willingly, Julien, but brothers or sisters who do not, by their virtuous lives and firm counsels, support the customs and dignity of their ancestors do not deserve to bear their name. She is younger than I; it is my right to command and hers to obey."

As Julien walked through the garden on his way to Mont d'Oro Castle, he said to himself:

"Pascal hit Vivienne and me with one stone. 'A brother who does not by his virtuous life——' That was meant for me. The rest was for Vivienne. That brother of mine is a shrewd man, very."

Manassa's colloquy with Pascal had left him in a very excited condition mentally. After uttering his spiteful declaration and slamming the door, he went into the garden prepared to be at war with all mankind. It so chanced that the first person with whom he came in contact was Terence, the head gardener.

Terence Devlin held the position of head gardener at Batistelli Castle. He had been guilty of an infraction of a law made by Englishmen for the government of Irishmen, and had left Ireland—not for his country's good, but for his own personal safety. He had made his way to France, but soon found that British spies were on his track, and he chose Corsica as a country not likely to be very thickly populated with British emissaries.

"What are you doing, sir?" yelled Manassa, as he bent over the Irishman, who was upon his knees, trimming a garden border.

"Did yez spake to me, sor?" asked Terence, looking up.

"Of course I did. I wished to tell you that I am

greatly displeased with your management of the grass-plots. Instead of pulling up the weeds one by one, as you should do, you let them grow, and they are taking deeper root every day. Why do you hire yourself out as a gardener without understanding your business?"

"Business, is it? And didn't I take the full charge of the parks and gardens of his Lordship, the Earl of Bamford, and her Ladyship, Countess Stannerly's gardens? No better gardener, sor, thin mesilf iver handled a spade, sure. This blatherin' country, sor, was born in wades, reared in wades, and, God willin', it will die in wades and be buried in wades. And is it mesilf that 'll pick thim out wan by wan? Whin Terry Devlin gets upon his knays to do the loikes o' that, sor, you may put him down as a brainless jackass, widout any sinse at all, at all."

"As I was saying when you had the impudence to interrupt me, there are far more weeds than grass in those plots—a most heathenish and unsightly spectacle. What did I hire you for, if not to do your work, and do it in strict accordance with my instructions? You forget yourself, sir!"

"I admit, sor, that the wades have got the best of the grass, and divil a doubt that they'll kape it, too. They niver was known to give in if they have a show of a chance. They are just like your counthrymen, sor. If a poor divil is cross-eyed, they kill him, and if he is not, they kill him all the same, sor. An' I take the liberty to tell ye, sor, that I resave my orders from the masther, Mr. Pashcal Batistelli, and no wan else. Do ye moind that, now?"

"The master!" exclaimed Manassa. "Pascal, the master! What folly! What do you suppose the lad can know about it? Why, that boy knows no more about gardening than a child unborn."

"But he is masther of the Castle, all the same, sor," said Terence, decidedly, "and I shall obey nobody else."

Manassa was thunderstruck, but he managed to ejaculate:

"Who is master here? Who am I, sir?"

Terence looked up, and with a slight twinkle in his eye, said:

"Mathoosaler's grandfather, I belave, sor!"

Manassa struck his cane upon the ground and cried, angrily: "You are an impudent puppy and black-guard. How dare you address me in that audacious manner? I'm not master, eh? You won't obey me, eh? I say you shall weed the grass-plots! We'll see whether you will obey or not. Clarine! Clarine!! Where's the jade gone? Gadding about, I suppose, as usual. I say you shall weed the grass-plots! Now go, sir, and send Pascal to me. We'll see whether you will obey me!"

Terence, who had remained upon his knees during this battle of words, now rose to his feet and started off as though he intended to summon Pascal Batistelli: but, instead of doing so, when he was out of sight of his recent antagonist, he entered the arbour and sat down, filled and lighted his pipe, and smoked contentedly. As he did so, he soliloquised:

"A foine, healthy counthry this is to allow a man to live afther he's lost his wits intoirely. Faith, I belave he was a captain of the big craft at the toime of the flood!"

Manassa walked on through the garden paths, striking now and then with his cane at a flaunting weed, but his mind did not run in one channel very long and his thoughts soon reverted to the coming birthday party.

"I shall be very busy," he thought, "until this party is over. What could they do without me? I am the only one who knows how things used to be done and how they ought to be done now. I have always been used to lords and ladies. People have no manners at the present day; even our children, although of baronial

descent, have but little idea of true gentility. Pascal and Julien appear every day without their regalia, but I insist upon their wearing the badge—the red rosette—when in full evening dress. The degeneracy of the present age is truly most shocking. Why, you would hardly believe they have not even the old coat of arms upon their carriage, and no outriders. Even the footman is dressed like a circus clown, and the coachman looks like an aide-de-camp. Shocking! Shocking! ! If only the barony had descended to me. I wonder if it did descend to me.”

Tired out mentally by his exciting controversies, and physically fatigued by his long walk, the old man sank upon a moss-covered stone which lay at the foot of a large tree, whose wide-spreading branches gave a grateful shade. He leaned against the old, worm-eaten, gnarled trunk, and was soon fast asleep.



CHAPTER XXI.

A BIRTHDAY PARTY.

ON the anniversary of her birthday, Vivienne received many congratulatory letters, and many visits from personal friends who could not be present to enjoy the festivities in the evening. From nearly all of the writers or callers she received some visible tokens of love or esteem. Vivienne was delighted with these evidences of regard, but looked forward with intense interest to the hour when the message from her dead father was to be placed in her hands.

Clarine had told her that she was born at six o'clock in the afternoon, and, as she would not be eighteen years old until that hour arrived, she would not give her the paper until that time. Vivienne coaxed, pleaded, and finally remonstrated, but the old nurse was inexorable.

After the candles were lighted in the rooms which were to be used by the guests, Clarine and Manassa made a tour of them. Manassa wished to remain through the evening, to be sure that the festivities were carried out in proper form. Clarine laughed and said:

"Why, you foolish old man, you would be sound asleep by seven o'clock, and if I stayed here to look after you, I should fall asleep, too. Wouldn't it be a pretty sight for the other guests to see us two old fogies sound asleep in the corner of the room? You know you snore terribly."

"No, I don't know it," snapped Manassa. "I never heard myself snore in my life, and never expect to."

"Well," said Clarine, "Vivienne is coming to my

room, for I have something to give her, and you must go to your own room, for, much as we usually enjoy your company, to-night we do not care for it."

When Clarine and Vivienne were alone together in the nurse's room, the former took from her bosom a sealed packet and handed it to the young girl.

"When your father gave it to me, the day of his death, it was unsealed. He told me that I might read it, and I have done so many times. Of late, I have feared that some prying eye might discover it, so I sealed it. My next fear was that some one might take it, and for a year I have carried it with me while awake and have placed it under my pillow when sleeping. I have kept the vow that I made to your dead father. Now I can die in peace, when Heaven wills."

"Shall I read it now?" asked Vivienne.

"Yes, dear, for I may be able to assist you if you do not understand it."

Vivienne ran her eyes quickly over the page. The writing was in a large, round hand, and although the paper was discoloured and the ink faded, each word was easily deciphered. As Vivienne read, the old nurse watched her attentively.

"Have you come to the part where it tells how to open and close the dungeon door?"

"Yes," cried Vivienne. "What wonderful mechanism! Who could have invented it? Oh, Clarine, it makes my blood run cold to think of that fearful dungeon shut out from the world by such demoniac ingenuity."

"But the Hall of Mirrors is considered the most beautiful room in the castle," said Clarine.

"And so it is. Julien and I used to love to play there, for as we ran about the room, or danced, we could see ourselves in the mirrors, and it always seemed as though we had many visitors who were joining in our games. We were too young to think that any of

those mirrors were hinged, and that when opened they would disclose a dungeon door behind them. Heaven grant that I may never have cause to open that door!"

"Never, unless in great extremity or to save human life," said Clarine, solemnly. "Those were your father's words to me, and I have never forgotten them. Now, darling, you must forget everything that will call up unpleasant memories, and be joyous and happy. I will go with you to your room and help you put on that beautiful dress which your brother Pascal gave you. There will be pretty girls here to-night, but none will be so beautiful as my little Viva."

What the old nurse had said was surely realised. There is no woman whose natural beauty is so great that it cannot be enhanced by the aid of art. Poets and painters rave over peasant girls and fisher maidens, and write about and paint them. Near the close of the poem, however, the poet makes a lady of his country or seaside heroine—clothes her in costly raiment and decks her with jewels. In poetry, as in music, there must be a *crescendo*. Again, the artist may marry an ideal face and form, but when she has become his, he selects delicate tints and filmy garments with which to clothe her, and his artistic sense inevitably leads him to the conclusion that the golden or raven-black hair, parted in the middle, with modest simplicity, should be replaced by the latest *coiffure*.

Beneath the dexterous hands of Clarine, who had dressed many a bride, Vivienne was transformed, and when the young girl looked in the mirror she started back in honest astonishment at the sight of her reflection.

"Viva," cried the old nurse, "you are perfect, and if I were Count Mont d'Oro I would fall down and worship you."

"If you were Count Mont d'Oro," replied Vivienne,

"I would allow you, but I shall not give the real Count any such opportunity."

"Well," said Clarine, "I will not worship you, but I will give you my blessing. May you have a long life, and health, happiness, and prosperity be ever yours." She kissed the young girl and the caress was returned in manifold. "Now I will go with you to your brothers," said Clarine, "and introduce you, for I am sure it will be necessary."

"Not until I have seen Manassa," cried Vivienne, and she made her way quickly to the old man's room. He sat in his chair, sound asleep, his hands resting upon the head of the oaken staff, his head bowed upon them.

Vivienne touched him upon the shoulder. He slept lightly, and awoke easily. At sight of the vision before him he started to his feet, rubbing his eyes.

"Beg pardon, Lady Julie," he exclaimed, "but I did not hear your bell. What are your commands?"

"This is not Lady Julie," cried Clarine; "this is our own Viva, but it is not strange that you do not know her. She has come for your blessing."

Vivienne sank upon her knees before him. The old man placed his trembling hands upon her head.

"May you be as happy as was the Lady Julie—she was the most beautiful woman in Corsica, and I was her favourite servant. I saved her life one day. I came near losing my own, but I would have given it willingly. My dear, you are a Batistelli, but the family has fallen from its high estate. The shame of the *Rimbecco* is upon it. Be true to your name and to your brothers who have sworn to remove the stigma."

The old man fell back heavily into his chair and covered his face with his hands. As Vivienne and Clarine left the room they heard him say: "*Rimbecco! Rimbecco!!*" and there were pathos, bitterness, and anger commingled in his voice.

The guests began to assemble. The Batistelli family

had been one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most influential in Corsica, and although its prestige had waned, it had not wholly departed. Vivienne had spread her invitations far and wide, and the acceptances indicated that the gathering would include representatives from the best families in Ajaccio and the surrounding country.

Among the first to arrive was the Mayor of Ajaccio, accompanied by his two daughters, Carlotta and Josefa. Count Napier Mont d'Oro escorted his mother, the Countess, and Miss Renville. Admiral Enright was accompanied by his daughter, Helen. Vivienne, whose quick eye saw every guest long before he was presented to her, noticed that Lieutenant Duquesne was not with them. The thought came to her that her brother Pascal had, without doubt, told the young Englishman that his presence was no longer desired, but her inward anger against her brother was far less intense than against Count Mont d'Oro, whom she looked upon as the real cause of the young man's proscription. Among the late arrivals was Dr. Valentino Procida, who was the proprietor of a private asylum for the insane at Salvanetra, a village about five miles from Alfieri. The company grew by constant accessions, until it became both large and brilliant, completely filling the spacious drawing-room.

Pascal and Julien, attired in the national costume, over which they wore the regalia of the Batistelli family, together with the traditional red rosette upon their left breasts, acted as ushers and presented the guests to Vivienne, upon whose face forced smiles quickly appeared, immediately followed by unmistakable looks of disappointment.

At a signal from Pascal the musicians began to play, while Julien motioned to the guests to step back, thereby leaving Vivienne standing alone in the middle of the great room.

Seven young and pretty girls, also wearing the national dress, entered, one of them bearing a floral wreath containing eighteen roses, which she placed upon Vivienne's head. As she did so, the musicians, who were provided with bells, rang out a silvery chime. The girls then joined hands, formed a circle about Vivienne, while their fresh young voices sang the Birthday Song:

"Set the birthday bells a-ringing;
To our queen her friends are bringing
Freshest flowers of every hue,
Dripping with the evening dew.
All advancing,
We are dancing,
Bringing flowers of every hue,
Dripping with the evening dew.
Hear the ringing and the chiming
Of the merry, merry bells,
Eighteen years their story tells.
How within the heart it swells!
All advancing,
We are dancing,
To the ringing of the bells,
Merry, merry birthday bells."

At the close of the song they let go of each other's hands and formed in line, facing Vivienne. Seven young men, dressed in the costume of peasants of the better class, next entered, and took positions behind the row of maidens. Pascal and Julien then stepped forward and escorted Vivienne to a rustic chair, which was covered with a profusion of flowers and which had been reserved for her use.

Now the musicians played some weird, peculiar dance music and the fourteen youths and maidens took part in a wild, characteristic Corsican dance. The steps and gestures were full of abandon, and although the staid Miss Helen Enright was not absolutely shocked, when the dance was over she had the impression that the conventionalities of society were not kept within as strict lines in Corsica as they were in England.

All sailors love to dance and to see others dance.

Admiral Enright was delighted. In the exuberance of his feelings, he grasped Pascal's hand and ejaculated:

"Bless my soul! A most re-mark-a-ble performance!" He turned to his daughter—"Helen, would it not be a grand idea to introduce so pleasant a custom into English society?"

Miss Enright was an adept in concealing her real thoughts—the ability to do so is a defensive armour which education only can supply—and she responded:

"I fear we could never acquire the habit of doing it so gracefully, papa."

Pascal bowed and replied: "I am pleased to know that you are not bored. We are not, as a general thing, fortunate in pleasing strangers with our manner of doing things."

Helen profited once more by her ability to conceal her displeasure and express the contrary:

"I am sure we have visited no place since we have left home that has afforded us so much pleasure as Corsica."

To this commendatory remark, the Admiral added: "We shall carry with us many happy recollections of this island, I assure you. That dance was really re-mark-a-ble; was it not, Helen?"

She whispered in her father's ear: "Yes, papa, I really think it was."

Adolphe, clothed in the livery of the Batistellis, announced that the birthday supper was served.

Events proved that in Corsica, as in other countries, this announcement was the signal for the gentleman guests to choose partners to accompany them to the supper room. Count Mont d'Oro offered his arm to Vivienne, who drew back with a marked gesture of refusal. Pascal saw it and, in a low voice, commanded her to accept the courtesy and not cause a scandal. They, accordingly, took their positions at the head of the line, being followed by Pascal and Miss Renville,

Julien and Miss Enright, while the Admiral escorted the Countess Mont d'Oro. The musicians struck up a march and the procession made a tour of the great room. As it was about to enter the corridor, Lieutenant Duquesne suddenly made his appearance in the full dress uniform of a naval lieutenant in Her Britannic Majesty's service.

Vivienne turned impulsively towards him, releasing her hold upon the Count's arm, and the procession, necessarily, came to a standstill.

Lieutenant Duquesne apologised to Vivienne for his late arrival, explaining that he had been obliged to go to the ship to make his preparations.

"I am glad that you are in time for supper," exclaimed Vivienne.

He bent low and said to her in an undertone: "I shall not enjoy it unless in your company."

"But I am engaged," and Vivienne looked towards the Count, who stood with face averted.

"You told me you were not."

A hot flush mantled Vivienne's cheek—she was not an adept in English humour or wit.

"You hesitate, but when we were in the forest that night you said that you would not forget me."

"Neither will I," she cried, with sudden determination. Before the Count could recover from his astonishment sufficiently to interpose, she had taken Victor's arm and they proceeded to the supper room, closely followed by the company, that regarded further delay as unnecessary.

The Count was filled with rage at the insult which he had received, and was deeply mortified because his discomfiture had been witnessed by so many. He looked for some avenue of escape from further observation. Espying a door partly open, he quickly entered the room and found himself in the ante-chamber of the great drawing-room—from which the singers and

dancers had emerged. Under the circumstances, he could not go to the supper room, nor would his pride allow him to leave the house until he had received an apology and reparation for the insult.

He finally decided to call a servant and have him summon Pascal and Julien. They soon appeared. The Count was resourceful and able to curb his passion when it was for his interest to do so. He began speaking in a severely dignified manner:

"Monsieur Pascal Batistelli, your sister has grossly insulted me in your presence and that of your guests. I demand an apology or reparation. I think I deserve both."

"My dear Count," said Pascal, "I deeply regret this unfortunate occurrence. My sister is self-willed, but she knows that she must ultimately do as I wish. I cannot humiliate her before her guests to-night. You must allow me to apologise for her rudeness, and I promise, as reparation, that she shall become your wife before a month has passed, and the same guests who are here to-night shall be bidden to witness the marriage ceremony."

"I accept your pledge," said the Count, "because I love your sister. Were it not so, I should demand satisfaction from you, her elder brother."

"I acknowledge your right to do so," said Pascal. "If I fulfil my pledge, will you be satisfied?"

"I will exact but one simple condition," the Count answered.

"And that is?" Pascal queried, while Julien clutched nervously at his sword-hilt.

"A simple request and one easily granted," said the Count. "It is that Lieutenant Duquesne shall leave this house at once."

Julien looked at his watch. "It is beyond the hour, Pascal. If we do not go at once we shall be too late."

"And you would postpone complying with my re-

quest until he has eaten his supper and can retire gracefully?" asked the Count, sarcastically.

"Let me explain," cried Pascal. "You have, no doubt, heard the rumour that Vandemar Della Coscia is in Corsica. You know what that means to us—and to him! Julien and I have an engagement to meet a man in the maple grove who has given us his word of honour that he can tell us where to find this man. Come with us, Count. We are well armed—we have our swords—and need fear no danger from a single man, who is, probably, unarmed."

The Count's first impulse was to speak and disclose what he had learned through the strategy of Villefort. Then he reflected that if the death of his enemy could be compassed without his complicity being apparent, his marriage to Vivienne might not, after all, be impossible.

On the way to the maple grove, Pascal told the Count how an old man had called upon him and had disclosed his identity, under a pledge of secrecy, and declared that he could point out Vandemar Della Coscia.

"I agreed to give him one hundred louis d'or," said Pascal, "if his information proved to be correct. Some time passed, and I heard nothing from him. Then he sent a letter by a messenger, who, in turn, intrusted it to a shepherd boy to deliver to me. I saw the messenger and learned that the possessor of the secret wished to know if the money would surely be paid. I have it with me, and if the man puts me on the track of Vandemar, he shall have the promised reward."

"I will pay half of it," said the Count, generously, but unguardedly.

They were now nearing the maple grove. The Count's offer had not been heard by Pascal, but it did not escape Julien's quick ear. The three men, with swords drawn, entered the grove.

"I am here," said Pascal, in a hoarse whisper.

The same old man who had visited him at the castle emerged from a clump of bushes. He carried a small lantern, which he held up so that its rays fell on Pascal's face and those of his companions. The man started back with a cry of dismay.

"We are friends," said Pascal. "Is that you, Paoli?"

"Hush!" growled the man. "Mention no names—the trees have ears. Have you brought the money?"

"I have it with me," said Pascal.

"Shall I come to the house and point him out, or shall I tell you how to identify him?" asked the man.

"Give us the name he is known by—that will be sufficient," said Pascal.

"He is called——" began the man.

Before he could speak the name there came a flash and a report from behind a clump of bushes not more than twenty feet away, and the man fell headlong to the ground, dead!

The three men advanced boldly towards the place from which the shot had come. They were met by a fusilade, the bullets, fortunately, perhaps intentionally, going over their heads.

"It is too hot for us here," said Pascal. "Let us go back to the house at once, where your request, my dear Count, shall be complied with."

Count Napier Mont d'Oro was the only one who knew that Victor Duquesne and Vandemar Della Coscia were one and the same person.

"My dear young lady," said the Count to himself, "what a sweet revenge I shall have when I disclose my secret to your guests."



CHAPTER XXII.

TREACHERY.

THOMAS GLYNNE and Jack De Vinne found life in the bandits' camp very irksome. They were not exposed to physical danger, for they were not called upon to accompany any of the bands which left camp on what they supposed to be predatory excursions.

Neither had forgotten the object of his visit to Corsica. Each wished to continue the search for Bertha Renville and be the first one to meet her; but they knew they were closely watched, and that any attempt to leave camp without Cromillian's consent would be resisted by force, and their careers cut short, perhaps, by rifle-bullets. So they were forced, against their wills, to remain "lookers-on in Vienna," and bide their time. The life they led was as enervating as it would have been in prison. Each asked for something to do to pass away the time, and it was arranged that Jack should keep the camp supplied with fresh water, while Glynnne felled trees and cut the firewood.

They were kept in a state of nervous excitement, for they expected any day that they might be called before Cromillian to learn the decision to which he had come after visiting Bertha. Each naturally felt that his claim was the stronger and would be respected. Glynnne considered that his rights as guardian were paramount, while Jack thought, if Bertha acknowledged her love for him, as he felt sure she would, that the verdict would be in his favour.

After leaving Barbera's *cabaret*, Villefort had started

off with the fixed intention of finding Cromillian and divulging Count Mont d'Oro's plot against Vandemar Della Coscia, for he felt sure that his discovery of the dual identity of Victor Duquesne would be fully substantiated.

Villefort did not know where to find Cromillian. He had heard rumours of the location of the bandits' camp—but camps can be easily changed from one place to another. They are like song-birds, or one's good luck—here to-day and gone to-morrow.

He had heard that "All roads lead to Rome," and it was equally true that all the roads in Corsica, within twenty miles, at least, led to Ajaccio. He knew that Cromillian's emissaries came to town, usually disguised, and to do this they must follow the roads, or one of them.

By chance, for fortune favours wicked people as often as it does good ones, Villefort took the most direct road to Cromillian's camp. After a long and weary tramp, he came to a small cottage, where he determined to ask for food and an opportunity to rest. As he neared the house, a girl about ten years of age opened the door and started to run down the path which led to the roadway, but, seeing Villefort, she stopped suddenly.

"Who lives here?" he asked.

"My mother," said Lulie, for it was she.

"Yes, I suppose so," remarked Villefort, "but what is your father's name?"

"My father is dead; my mother is called the Widow Nafilet."

Villefort started. He had heard that name before—but in what connection? He stood in deep thought, Lulie regarding him attentively, wondering, child-like, what the object of his visit could be, for few strangers were seen in that out-of-the-way locality. As the result of his deliberation, Villefort gave up for a time, at least, his intention of asking for food, and said:

"I want to find a man named Cromillian. Do you know him?"

"What—Uncle Cromillian?" asked the child. "He is the best friend we have—mother and I."

"Where can I find him?" persisted Villefort.

"Are you alone?" queried Lulie.

Villefort nodded.

"I see you have no gun. Is there a pistol or a stiletto inside your jacket?"

Villefort threw it open. "I am unarmed," he said. "Come and see if I do not speak the truth."

Lulie approached, and her bright eyes searched him from head to foot.

"Clasp your hands behind you," said she. "I will take your arm and lead you to him. But if you unclasp your hands, I shall give the danger signal and Uncle Cromillian will shoot you dead with his rifle."

The fact was that Cromillian went often to the Widow Naflet's house. Although he usually lived upon it for weeks at a time, he did not relish the coarse food rudely prepared by his men, and for that reason had arranged with the Widow Naflet to cook and send his meals to him when his camp was within a reasonable distance, Lulie being the messenger. Cromillian had accounts to keep and letters to write. In camp, the facilities for such work were very poor, and he found that a snug room and large table, a high-backed chair and a bright wood fire were much better suited to his wants and comfort than the arbour in the woods which he was obliged to use in an emergency.

Lulie led Villefort into the kitchen, where her mother was at work.

"Mother," she cried, "keep your eye on this man! If he unclasps his hands, give the signal and Uncle Cromillian will come out with his rifle."

Lulie entered an adjoining room, closing the door quickly. The widow Naflet kept on with her work,

but one eye or the other was fastened on Villefort who, apparently at his ease, was considering the best manner in which to open his conversation with the redoubtable bandit, at the mere mention of whose name citizens of Ajaccio and the surrounding country trembled with an inexplicable fear. He had not harmed them as yet, but they did not know what he might do if his demands were not promptly satisfied.

Lulie opened the door and beckoned to Villefort. "Come in—he will see you," she said.

Cromillian was seated at the table, which was covered with documents and letters, when Villefort entered.

"And what does Monsieur Villefort wish from me?" were Cromillian's first words.

"You know me, then?" asked Villefort.

"Yes, and but little to your credit. You are the hired minion of young Count Mont d'Oro, who is a spendthrift and a profligate. I have an open account, which I shall settle with him soon."

"Perhaps I can aid you to get what is due you," said Villefort, for he thought that he must improve his standing with the bandit as soon as possible.

"Perhaps you can," cried Cromillian, "but I shall pay you nothing if you do."

"I do not ask for any reward."

"I understand," said Cromillian. "You two rascals have fallen out. He has wronged you, or you think he has, and you have come to me to betray him—in other words, you wish to get even with him through my kind offices."

Villefort felt that the situation was critical. He must come at once to the point.

"You know, of course, that Vandemar Della Coscia is in Corsica."

In spite of his great power of self-command, Cromillian gave an involuntary start. Villefort perceived his advantage and went on:

"You know, of course, that Count Mont d'Oro fought a duel with a Lieutenant Duquesne, who is attached to the British frigate now at Ajaccio."

Cromillian nodded. Villefort nerved himself for the coming ordeal.

"Count Mont d'Oro put me on the track of the young Englishman and I have discovered that he is no Englishman at all, but that he is a Corsican, and his right name is Vandemar Della Coscia!"

Cromillian's face was unmoved. "Does the Count know this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Villefort; "he hired me to follow the man and, when he paid me, he cheated me out of a louis d'or which I had to give to Barbera for writing a letter."

"But what matters all this to me?" asked Cromillian.

Villefort reflected before answering. Was Cromillian really ignorant, or was he only trying to draw him out before saying anything himself? Then Villefort, as many other rascals have done under similar circumstances, having told what he felt to be the truth, decided to rely in future upon invention. Cromillian had turned his face away and was gazing intently at the blazing wood fire in the fireplace.

"I suppose you know," Villefort went on, and he watched Cromillian closely to see the effect of his words, "that Manuel Della Coscia is also in Corsica under an assumed name."

Cromillian turned his head and looked Villefort squarely in the face.

"Under what name did you say?" he asked.

Villefort was dumfounded. This was asking too much—more than he had bargained for. He felt that he must fall back upon the truth, so he replied:

"I do not know."

"Can you tell me anything more that you do know?"



VANDEMAR



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"I can relate some suspicious circumstances," said Villefort.

"Go on!"

"I am well acquainted with the Batistelli servants. Adolphe is easily bribed; Snodine is a woman to whom a secret is of no value unless she can tell it; while Manassa is a garrulous old fool who will tell all he knows for nothing."

"What have you found out?" This question was uttered in a tone that was sharp and commanding.

"Just this," said Villefort, and he adopted a confidential manner; "you see, I am well acquainted at the hotel, and hotel servants are very observing—and very communicative under certain circumstances. It seems that one day an old man—no one at the hotel knew who he was—brought a letter from somebody for Lieutenant Duquesne. After reading this letter, probably, he cut his initials—V. D. C.—into the table. Those initials gave me my first clue."

"But what about the old man?" asked Cromillan, for the first time showing some interest in what was being told to him.

"All right, I'll tell you all I know," said Villefort, still more confidentially than before. "One of the hotel servants had occasion to walk up the road and saw the old man going into the Batistelli castle. I learned from Adolphe, for a consideration, that he listened and heard Pascal Batistelli tell the man that he would give him a hundred louis d'or for something, but Adolphe could not hear just what it was. Several days ago, a shepherd boy brought a letter to Pascal Batistelli. Adolphe followed the boy and saw him give something to a man who was in the maple grove—but Adolphe says he was not the old man who first came to see Pascal. Two things Adolphe noticed—that the man wore a red vest under his jacket, and that he had lost the thumb and forefinger of his right hand."

Cromillian brought his hand down upon the table with such force that Villefort recoiled in astonishment. The bandit then set his teeth tightly together and his brows were knit. He was recalling some circumstances, and the memories were evidently unpleasant.

Paoli had wished to go and see his mother and had sent a man in his place to carry that letter to Lieutenant Duquesne. Paoli had asked to go again to see his mother, when he had wished him to go to Ajaccio. This time Paoli had supplied another substitute—a man wearing a red vest, who had lost the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

Cromillian arose, went to a heavy oaken chest, unlocked it, and took out a bag in which the coins clinked as he dropped it upon the table. He counted out eleven louis d'or.

"Here," he said, pushing it toward Villefort, "is the louis d'or which Count Mont d'Oro should have paid you; here are ten more for the information which you have given me, which may or may not prove valuable. Be discreet, learn all you can, and your reward will be doubled. Money comes easily to me and I consider it my duty to keep it moving. Go, now! I will attend to Count Mont d'Oro and those who are aiding him."

The next morning, Cromillian returned early to his camp. Hardly had he reached it, when Paoli came to him and announced, with tears in his eyes, that his mother was dead and that he wished a furlough for several days in which to attend to her burial and to secure the little inheritance which was to come to him.

"I shall be busy for a while," said Cromillian, "but I will soon send for you and hear your report on what has taken place during the three days I have been away. After that, you may go."

As Paoli was walking away, Cromillian cried:

"Ah, Paoli, by mistake, I left something at the Widow Nafilet's. Send Borteno here. Since he lost

his thumb and forefinger in that last scrimmage with the *gens d'armes* his fighting days are over, for he cannot pull a trigger; but he will make a good messenger, for his legs are sturdy and he can keep a secret."

Borteno soon appeared.

"Tell Londora and Fabria that I wish to see them."

In a short time Borteno returned, accompanied by the two men.

The harbour used by Cromillian for what might be called his private office, ended at the base of a high hill, being, in reality, a *cul-de-sac*.

"Go to the farther end of the harbour," said Cromillian to Borteno. "I wish to speak to you."

After he had gone, Cromillian said in an undertone to the two men:

"If any one attempts to leave the harbour before I do, shoot him down."

He turned and entered the grove, finding Borteno at the farthest extremity.

"Borteno," said he, "I am going to ask you a question, and whether you live or die within the hour depends upon your answer."

The man dropped his eyes and trembled visibly.

"My question," said Cromillian, "has two parts to it, but it will take but few words to answer both."

Borteno made a strenuous effort to regain his composure, and partly succeeded. "You are my chief, and your word is law," he replied.

"Then listen," said Cromillian. "On what night, and at what hour, will Pascal Batistelli be in the maple grove behind his castle, and who of my followers will meet him there to get a hundred louis d'or? Mind you, I do not ask for what, for I already know."

The man's eyes almost started from their sockets—but he could not speak.

"I do not blame you," said Cromillian, "for you but obeyed orders, but you must answer my questions."

With trembling voice Borteno said: "To-morrow night, at nine o'clock."

Cromillian approached the man and they stood face to face, eye to eye.

"What more?"

Borteno uttered but one word—"Paoli!"

"It is well," said Cromillian. "Come with me."

When they reached the entrance to the grove, Londora and Fabria stood there, rifles in hand. Borteno was in the advance. Suddenly, Cromillian grasped him by the collar of his jacket and pulled him backward.

"I had almost forgotten," he muttered. To the two sentinels, he said:

"Bind him and gag him, and let no one approach him until I give you orders."

On the night of Vivienne's birthday party, Cromillian, accompanied by Londora, Fabria, and six more of his trusted men, made their way to Alfieri and concealed themselves in the maple grove.

As Paoli opened his mouth to tell Pascal Batistelli that Lieutenant Victor Duquesne was in reality Vandemar Della Coscia, a leaden messenger from Cromillian's rifle entered his brain.

After the fusilade, which caused the Batistelli brothers and Count Mont d'Oro to retreat to the Castle, Cromillian turned to his men and said:

"There is but one proper reward for treachery—and that is death! Reload and follow me! We shall have more and heavier work shortly."



CHAPTER XXIII.

“ HE IS THE MAN ! ”

COUNT MONT D'ORO, Pascal, and Julien did not loiter on their return to the castle. An unseen enemy is always more terrible than one who stands out in plain view, and although the three men were not devoid of physical courage, and possessed the natural pride of their race, they felt greatly relieved and breathed much easier when they reached the reception room of the castle, which they had left such a short time before on what had proved to be a dangerous and fruitless errand.

They found the place empty, for the guests had not yet returned from the supper room. They could hear the hum of voices, and occasionally one broke into a song, the refrain of which was taken up by the company at the table, while at intervals the music of the orchestra could be heard.

“ Who could have fired that shot ? ” asked Julien.

“ It was Cromillian,” replied Pascal. “ The man who was on the point of disclosing the identity of Vandemar Della Coscia was Paoli, Cromillian's lieutenant. That moral bandit, as they call him, is a devil. I shall send to France for authority to hunt him down and kill him, as a foe to society. Vandemar has escaped us, but Cromillian shall not ! ”

“ Vandemar has not escaped us,” said the Count. “ It is unfortunate that Paoli was killed, but I possess the secret which he would have disclosed.”

“ You ! ” cried Pascal and Julien, astonished. “ Who is he ? Where is he ? ”

“ Let us seek some other room,” suggested the Count. “ The guests will soon return.”

They passed into the adjoining ante-chamber. When there, Count Mont d'Oro told of the discovery made by Villefort, but took all the credit to himself.

"You have a double claim upon our gratitude," said Pascal. "Your forbearance under the insult to which you were subjected this evening by our sister, and the great service which you say you can render our family in enabling us to remove the stain of *Rimbecco* from our name, will make us your friends for life. The boon you ask—the hand of our sister—is a compliment to us rather than a reward to you.

"Go, Julien," he cried, "and acquaint Vivienne of our discovery. Then see that the ladies remain in the supper room, for this affair shall be settled within the walls of the castle. Vandemar shall not leave this house alive. The Count and I will send word to our retainers and friends, so that they may be witnesses of this act of justice."

Julien sent Adolphe to summon Vivienne to the ante-chamber. She came immediately, for the disappearance of Count Mont d'Oro and her brothers, together with their long absence, filled her with indefinable fear.

"What is it, Julien?" she cried. "Why have you sent for me? What has happened?"

"We have made a most miraculous discovery," he answered, and Vivienne judged from the expression on his face that whatever it might be, the knowledge gave him great pleasure.

"Tell me," said Vivienne. "I hope it is something that I can enjoy as well as you. Now, Julien, was not that a selfish remark?" and she laughed at her own desire to be pleased.

"We have learned," said Julien, and he lowered his voice, "that this so-called Englishman, this Lieutenant Duquesne, is the enemy of our family—Vandemar Della Coscia!"

For a second it seemed to Vivienne as though the blood ceased to move in her veins, and that her heart stood still, but she summoned courage.

"Who told you this?" she gasped.

"Count Mont d'Oro."

"A miserable plot!" she exclaimed. "He looks upon Lieutenant Duquesne as a rival and has hatched up this story to compass his death. How can men be so base?"

"You have answered your own question," said Julien. "For the love of a woman man can make himself either a hero or a villain. But think, Vivienne, when this man is dead, no one can point the finger of scorn at us, or couple the word *Rimbecco* with our family name."

"But it is a wicked plot," cried Vivienne. "The Count has no proof. He could easily invent such a story as he told you. The night I followed you to the woods, Julien, I was robbed of my clothing and jewels and left to die in the storm. Lieutenant Duquesne saved my life. Then I saved his, for it was I who killed the two men who had been hired by Count Mont d'Oro to murder the man who, he now says, is Vandemar Della Coscia. How plain this all is! It is strange that you cannot see it, Julien. You and Pascal may do as you will, but I shall warn Lieutenant Duquesne so that he may escape. He is unarmed, and cannot defend himself against you all."

Julien grasped his sister by the arm, but she broke away. Breathing heavily, and with wild, staring eyes, she rushed into the reception room, to the great astonishment of the assembled guests.

Before she could speak, other voices were heard. They were the voices of men, and they chanted the words which had so often preceded the death of some man or woman doomed by the vendetta:

"Place on the wall before my bed
 My cross of honour well gained.
 To my sons, my sons, in a far country,
 Convey my cross and bloody vest.
 He, my first born, will see the rents.
 For each rent, a rent in another shirt,
 A wound in another heart. Vengeance!
 The hour for vengeance is nigh.
 Make ready his bed in the valley of skulls;
 He comes, the last of his race, but he
 Comes to his couch with a stain on his shroud,
 Only to die; the vendetta, the spirit of the vendetta
 Is awake; it has slept too long. Blood for blood!
 The noble house of Batistelli no longer shall
 Bear the dread reproach of *Rimbeccare*; the stain
 Shall now be washed away in blood.
 Vandemar must die!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Admiral Enright.
 "A most re-mark-a-ble serenade. What does it mean?"

The question was answered by the Mayor of Ajaccio:
 "It is the chant of the Death Brothers."

"The Death Brothers?" asked Helen. "But this is a birthday fête, not a funeral."

"In Corsica," said the Mayor, "one is often followed by the other."

"But," cried the Admiral, "cannot you as mayor, order them away?"

"I am unarmed," was the reply, "and have no *posse* with me."

"But you represent the law," cried Helen.

"I do," said the Mayor, "but the vendetta is above the law. I can deal with the offenders afterwards, when known, but it is impossible to prevent the tragedy."

So saying, he beckoned to one of the gentlemen present and they left the room together.

While this conversation was going on, Vivienne had eagerly scanned the faces of the guests, but Victor was not there. Where could he be? Had they already killed him? Were the Death Brothers chanting over

his dead body? Had Pascal and the Count met him in the garden and wreaked their double vengeance upon him?

At that moment Victor entered, escorting the Countess Mont d'Oro and Miss Renville. Conducting them to chairs, he made his way at once to Vivienne.

"Pardon me," he said, "but after I was forsaken by you, I discovered that the Countess and her friend had been deserted by their cavaliers, and I proffered myself as escort."

Vivienne moved to a part of the room where there were fewer listeners. Then she said in suppressed tones:

"You must leave the castle at once, Lieutenant Duquesne. You are in danger. The Count wishes your life. It is my fault, for I insulted him grievously, and now you must suffer. Oh, leave the castle before they come back. Go to your ship—that is your only place of safety. I will have a horse saddled and you can escape easily."

Vivienne did not mention that he was suspected of being Vandemar Della Coscia. She did not believe the story, and why should she speak of it? If she did, he might think that she, too, believed it; so she simply warned him, in order to keep her word.

Victor stood irresolute. He was unarmed, and knew the Count to be a vindictive, revengeful enemy, but he certainly would not murder him in cold blood in the presence of so many witnesses. He turned to Vivienne:

"Let the Count do his worst! I shall remain!"

The chanting of the *Rimbeccare* had ceased, but it was followed by shouts and cries which portended death to the object of the Death Brothers' vengeance. The sound of moving men was heard; then Count Mont d'Oro, followed by Pascal, Julien, and the Death Brothers, entered the room, the startled and affrighted

guests making way for them. The Count advanced towards Victor, who stood beside Vivienne. He pointed his finger at Victor and cried:

"He is the man!"

Then, turning to the guests, he said, in his most polite manner:

"I beg the pardon of the ladies and gentlemen present for what is about to occur. I would advise the ladies to leave the room, for the scene which is to follow is not one they should look upon. It will be an act of justice long delayed."

The Mayor of Ajaccio, who had returned and heard the Count's words, stepped forward, and said, in firm tones:

"If it is an act of justice, I represent the law and will see that it is administered."

"It is an act of justice," cried Pascal; "but it is more. It is something that affects the honour and good name of the Batistellis, and that is beyond your jurisdiction. Speak up, Count Mont d'Oro, and let all listen."

"Before you all," cried the Count, "I declare that the man standing there," and he again pointed his finger at Victor, "is masquerading under an assumed name. He is not the one he seems to be. He is not an Englishman, but a Corsican. His name is not Victor Duquesne, but Vandemar Della Coscia!"

"It is false, good friends," cried Vivienne. "The Count does not contemplate an act of justice, but one of vengeance."

"It is true," cried Pascal. "He is a son of the man who murdered my father, and by our unwritten law, handed down to us for hundreds of years, his death is but a poor requital for his father's crime."

Count Mont d'Oro unsheathed his sword and addressed Pascal:

"It is my right to secure satisfaction for the insult

given me before your guests to-night. If in doing this I avenge your wrongs, so much the better."

As Count Mont d'Oro, with drawn sword, advanced towards Victor, who, unarmed, looked at him proudly and defiantly, loud cries burst from many of the ladies, who averted or covered their faces, while some of the gentlemen exclaimed:

"It is not the Count's right. It belongs to Pascal and Julien."

Vivienne turned an entreating face towards Admiral Enright. Would he do nothing to save his friend and brother officer? Then she noticed for the first time that the Admiral's sword hung by his side. She leaped towards him, grasped the hilt, drew the weapon from its scabbard and, an instant later, placed it in Victor's hand. Then she reeled, and would have fallen had not the Admiral and his daughter supported her.

Victor was an adroit swordsman. He was cool and collected, while his antagonist was angry and over-confident. Victor felt that the contest meant death to one of them. He loved, and he wished to live. The Count's passion made him almost a madman, and the fight was of long duration.

"Bless my soul!" cried the Admiral. "That is the most re-mark-a-ble bit of fencing I ever saw."

But the end came. For an instant the Count was off his guard. Victor saw his opportunity and sent his blade through the Count's sword-arm.

Pascal, sword in hand, rushed forward and joined in the attack. At the same moment Julien signalled with his sword to the Death Brothers, who, with stiletos, gathered about the contestants.

"Bless my soul!" cried the Admiral. "This is murder."

Pascal was not a good swordsman, and his advent disconcerted rather than aided the Count, who struck wildly, putting at defiance both science and skill. Vic-

tor did not wish to injure Pascal, but he had no compunctions as regarded the Count. Although opposed by two men, he changed his tactics from the defensive to the aggressive. Using a trick which he had learned from his French fencing-master, he disarmed Pascal, sending his sword flying into the air. As it fell the hilt struck the Count upon the head. Bewildered by the blow, he dropped his sword-point so low that it left the upper part of his body unguarded, and the next moment Victor ran him through.

The Count dropped his weapon and threw both hands into the air. The horrified spectators expected to see him reel and fall backwards, but, instead, he placed both hands upon his chest, as though striving to check the stream of blood which welled forth. His strength soon failed him; he sank upon his knees, then fell prone upon his face.

Pascal regained his sword and was joined by Julien. Victor was now confronted by the brothers of the woman whom he loved. The situation was a terrible one. His first thought was to throw down his sword and let them wreak their vengeance upon him. But life is sweet, and love is sweeter. Perhaps he could disarm them both, for even together they were not his equal in sword-play.

At that moment a loud report was heard outside, and a rifle bullet struck Victor's wrist. It did not pass through it, but, momentarily, paralysed his sword-arm and the weapon fell from his nerveless grasp. Victor retreated several paces—he must gain time. He soon felt the strength returning to his arm, but how could he regain possession of his sword? Pascal and Julien were advancing towards him, when Vivienne threw herself upon her knees, and grasping her brothers, prevented their onward movement.

"Traitor!" cried Pascal. "Get out of the way. You are no longer a Batistelli."

Releasing her hold, Vivienne accomplished her purpose. Reaching behind her brother Julien, she secured Victor's sword. Then, leaping to her feet, she cried: "You may kill him, but you shall not murder him."

Armed again, Victor faced his opponents, but the apparently unequal hand-to-hand conflict was over. With howls like those of a pack of hungry wolves, Cromillian, followed by his moral bandits—who, in fact, looked more like a band of ragged rascals—burst into the room, and the tide of battle was turned. As Cromillian reached the body of the Count, he stooped and picked up the sword, at the same time dropping his rifle upon the floor. It was he who had fired the shot which had been intended for Pascal or Julien, not for Victor. The uncertain movements of the sword-players had affected his usual unerring aim.

"Two against two is fair fighting," he cried. "Come on, you noble sons of Batistelli, or I will cry *Rimbecco* so that all can hear it."

Stung to the quick by this, to them, insulting bravado, they rushed forward. Despite the injury to his arm, Victor, encouraged by the presence of Cromillian, repeated the trick, and once more sent Pascal's sword flying through the air. But Julien's fate was more serious. He was a better swordsman than his brother, but he could not withstand the furious onslaught of Cromillian, who battered down his guard time after time, and finally gave him a mortal wound.

Vivienne had watched the fight in every detail. She saw her brother Pascal disarmed and at Victor's mercy—but she had no feeling of sorrow at his impending fate. Then she saw her brother Julien fall—and, still, there was no pang of regret. Her thoughts were of Victor, and of him alone.

The Death Brothers were cowed, for the muzzles of the bandits' rifles covered them. Vivienne grasped Victor's arm.

"Come with me," she whispered, "and I will lead you to a place of safety."

He obeyed without a word. She pulled aside some tapestry, opened a door which had been concealed by it, and a moment later he was following her down a long passageway, so dark that he was unable to discern the outlines of her form.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HALL OF MIRRORS.

CROMILLIAN'S keen eye had seen Vivienne approach Victor. She could not have said much to him, for, an instant later, she disappeared from the room. Cromillian looked at Pascal, but the latter did not seem inclined to measure swords with him, so he glanced once more at the spot where Vivienne had stood and found that Victor, too, was gone.

The object of his visit to the Batistelli castle had been attained—in fact, he had done more than he had intended, for the killing of either Pascal or Julien had not been premeditated.

One of his objects had been to punish treachery—and Paoli was dead; another had been to protect Victor from the vendetta—and that, too, had doubtless been accomplished, and Victor was probably now on his way to his ship, beyond the reach of his enemies.

As active hostilities seemed to be at an end, Cromillian quickly came to the decision that he and his men would be more at home in the *maquis* than in the Batistelli reception room.

When they reached the door, they found their way barred by a body of *gens d'armes*. The Mayor of Ajaccio had dispatched a special messenger to summon them, and, as usual, they had arrived after the trouble was over. Neither Cromillian nor his men feared the *gens d'armes*. With loud yells, they rushed forward, scattering the police as though they had been puppets.

After Cromillian and his bandits had left the castle,

the *gens d'armes* recovered from their surprise and, with commendable courage, started in pursuit of the outlaws. Half an hour later they returned, and the leader reported to the Mayor that their search had been fruitless. That official provided them with a task much more to their liking—to act as his escort back to Ajaccio.

Dr. Procida came forward at once to see if he could be of assistance to the wounded men. After examining the Count's body, he looked up and found Pascal regarding him attentively. The doctor shook his head, ruefully: "He is past human aid." He then turned his attention to Julien, making his examination much more thorough. Again, he looked up—Pascal still stood regarding him fixedly.

"Nothing can be done," he said; "he is dead."

The evening which had opened so pleasantly had ended tragically. The guests expressed their sympathy to Pascal and to Countess Mont d'Oro, then departed quickly for their homes.

A messenger was sent to summon the servants of the Countess Mont d'Oro, and the body of the young Count was conveyed to his mother's house.

During the evening, Miss Enright had become acquainted with the Countess and Bertha. At the latter's suggestion, the Countess invited the Admiral and his daughter to return home with her, as it would be almost impossible to reach their vessel at that late hour, and the invitation was gladly accepted. After what had taken place, a longer residence at the Batistelli castle would have been intolerable to Helen. Her father, used to scenes of blood, would not have been so sensitive about the matter, although he warmly resented the treatment which his lieutenant had received.

"This is a most re-mark-a-ble country," he said to his daughter, as they were on their way to the Countess Mont d'Oro's. "I thought you said the Corsicans were

noted for their hospitality, and that the person of a guest was sacred."

"So it is," replied Helen, "until it comes in conflict with the vendetta, whose demands are superior to custom and to all law, whether human or divine."

"Bless my soul! What a swordsman Victor is! I'll have him made a captain as soon as I get back to England."

Before retiring, Bertha went to the Countess's boudoir to express her sympathy for her great affliction.

"It is a terrible blow to have lost your only son."

The Countess's eyes were tearless.

"He has lost more than I have," she said. "He was never a good son to me. I would have been a good mother to him, but he spurned my advice and cursed me when I reproved him for his folly or his wickedness. His life has been cut short, and so have his sins."

Manassa had been awakened by the shouts and the firing of the gun which had wounded Victor, and made his way to the reception room. He knelt beside the body of Julien, alternately weeping for the dead Batiselli and cursing the Della Coscias.

Pascal reasoned that Victor had not escaped from the castle, but had been taken by Vivienne to some hiding-place within. Bidding the Death Brothers follow him, he searched every nook and corner of room after room, without success, until only one remained—the Hall of Mirrors.

At the top of the large square tower of Batistelli Castle was the dungeon chamber mentioned in the letter left by Vivienne's father. That letter, together with the instructions for opening the dungeon door, had been given to Vivienne that evening by Clarine. They were too precious to be trusted even to the guardianship of lock and key, and Vivienne had concealed them in the bosom of her dress.

In front of the dungeon chamber was the Hall of Mirrors, so called because the four sides were covered by large mirrors which extended from floor to ceiling. One unacquainted with the fact would never have imagined that the four mirrors, covering the walls in which was the door leading to the dungeon chamber, were hinged. When these four mirrors, which opened like doors, were thrown back, a new surprise greeted the eye. Upon the wall was painted a picture—the subject being the Garden of Eden. In the foreground stood Adam and Eve, while a short distance from them was a tree, among the leaves of which the body of a serpent could be seen.

On this fatal night, the mirrors concealing the dungeon door were closed, as they had been for a score of years, at least. How often Conrad Batistelli had visited it during his lifetime, no one knew. But, some twenty years before, Clarine had told Manassa that she had seen the master coming down the long flight of stone steps that led to the Hall of Mirrors. After making him promise not to reveal what she should say, she told him that the master's face was white as a sheet; that he had sent her for some wine, and that when she went into his room an hour later, the bottle was empty.

"And you know, Manassa," she had said, "he has never been a drinking man. Something must have frightened him. I wonder what there is in that old tower."

And Manassa, who had a poor opinion of women, had replied, sneeringly:

"If there is anything mysterious up there, you will probably find out what it is before you are satisfied. In woman, curiosity takes the place of courage."

On the evening of the birthday anniversary, Pascal had given orders that every candle in the castle should be lighted, and when Vivienne and Victor entered the Hall of Mirrors they found them burning brightly in

the sconces on the wall between the mirrors, and in the candelabra.

"You are safer here than outside," said Vivienne. "I will let you know when the castle is clear, and then there will, no doubt, be a chance for you to escape, and if you will allow me to advise you, monsieur, I should say leave Corsica—for a season at least. No doubt, you and your friends will be glad to turn your backs upon a nation which you must henceforth consider as inhabited by barbarians."

"Not at all, dear friend! There are some here, mademoiselle, whom I shall greatly esteem while life lasts."

"Try to forgive my brothers, if you can; they have been fearfully misled."

"I would forgive any whom you love, mademoiselle, even though they subjected me to the keenest torture, but never can I feel greater remorse than I do at this moment."

"Remorse—and for what?" cried Vivienne.

Victor was obliged to strain a point in order to supply a suitable explanation of his feelings. He remembered that Vivienne had told him that she did not love Count Mont d'Oro, and would never marry him. Victor knew that Vivienne was his friend, or she would not have twice placed a weapon in his hand to enable him to defend himself. He had never declared his love for her, and he had no right to presume that she was in love with him. He felt that she would not have aided him had she known him to be a Della Coscia. Then Miss Enright had told him that Corsican women were passionate—adding that passionate women were usually fickle. Did Vivienne love him? He would test her.

"My remorse," he said, "is due to the fact that I have caused the death of Count Mont d'Oro. Do you remember the flower you gave me the morning that we first met? Here it is. I have it with me always,"

and he held up the white rose with blood-stained petals. "I had sworn by this little flower never to injure any whom you loved, even to save my own life. And now, God forgive me! I have killed one dearer to you than a brother. I dare not ask your pardon for the rash act—I can only plead with Heaven to soften your heart towards me."

"I do not understand you," said Vivienne. "The Count dearer to me than a brother? Did I not tell you——"

Victor persisted:

"How can I hope for pardon from you, his betrothed wife!" He looked at the flower: "On each tiny petal I read a lesson—peace and love. I have proved recreant to my vow, sweet emblem. I am unworthy of a gift so pure. Die, then, with the fondest hopes my heart ever cherished. I crush both beneath my feet!"

He threw the flower upon the floor and raised his foot——

"No, you shall not!" cried Vivienne. "Do not destroy it!" As she spoke, she knelt and picked up the flower. "There is a magic charm hidden within its petals. The assassin's steel could not pierce the breast upon which it reposed. Would you, then, throw away so powerful a talisman?"

"Assassin? You do not mean——"

"Yes, Count Mont d'Oro was no better than an assassin. Three times he sought your life, not because you had injured him, but because you stood in his path."

"Then you did not love him?"

"I hated—I abhorred him! I honour the hand that struck him down." She took Victor's right hand in hers: "This is the hand, and to its keeping I intrust, once more, this little, faded flower. Keep it as a memento of me, and when you are far away, look at it

sometimes and remember that you left one true friend in Corsica."

Victor took the flower and pressed it to his lips:

"It shall never leave me more! Vivienne, you have saved my life, not only once, but twice, at the risk of your own. I must—I will speak, now that we are about to part forever. I must tell you that the life you saved is henceforth worthless to me unless blest by your love. Oh, you could not have avoided seeing my struggle, even while it seemed most hopeless. My future happiness is in your keeping. A word from your lips will forever seal the fate of one who loves you with a devotion second only to that which we owe to God. Speak, Vivienne! But, remember, you hold my life and its dearest hopes in your keeping. One word will bid me live and hope, or blast forever the fondest dream of my life!"

Vivienne was unconventional. She lifted her luminous black eyes and looked straight into his. There was no time for idle sentiment. The happiness of two lives, the fate of one, hung upon her answer.

"If, indeed, it rests with me, then I bid you live and be happy, as I shall be."

Vivienne extended her hand, which Victor took and held for one brief moment. It was with difficulty that he restrained the impulse to clasp her in his arms and kiss her sweet lips, which had so frankly confessed her love for him. But Victor had a chivalric nature and he knew that, considering the avowal that must be made, such an act would be ungenerous. Hard as it was to utter the words which would part them forever, he realised that they must be spoken. Victor flung her hand from him, and cried:

"You love me, rash girl! I see it in the soft tenderness of your eyes—I felt it in the fervent pressure of your hand. No, no, you must not! Speak but one kind word to me and you outrage every inherent prin-

ciple of your race! Dare even to regard me with pity and you forfeit every right to your boasted name and lineage! Oh, I cannot—will not—deceive you, even to win your matchless heart. You shall know me as I am, and then I will die at your feet!”

He passed her the sword, the blade still reddened with the blood of Count Mont d’Oro. He sank upon his knees, threw his coat wide open, baring his chest for the expected blow, and cried:

“Strike, for I am Vandemar!”

Vivienne started back, gazing at him with horror-stricken eyes. She raised the sword as if to strike—then it fell from her hand, clanging loudly upon the stone. She staggered, and leaned for support against one of the mirrors, which reflected her shrinking form, her death-white face, and closed eyes. She had shut them tightly, for before her had risen the picture of Vandemar lying dead at her feet, she standing over him, the sword, dripping with his blood, in her hands.

Vandemar saw her distress and, arising, said:

“You are suffering. Let me assist you.”

“Stand back! Do not touch me!” and Vivienne retreated towards the door which led from the room.

“What was that?” She bent low and listened. It was the sound of many feet on the stairway. They came nearer and nearer; then there were shouts and cries.

Summoning all her strength, she shot the rusty bolt into place. Some one tried to open the door, but it resisted his efforts. Then heavy blows rained upon it and a voice cried:

“Open the door! You cannot escape! We have you safely cornered.”

There was a lull for a moment, then Vivienne heard her brother’s voice:

“Vivienne, I command you to open the door. If you do not, it will be broken down.”

Vivienne heard the command, but she did not obey it; instead, she turned a pleading face to Vandemar.

"I will open it," he said, and placed his hand upon the bolt.

She grasped his hand and pulled it away. "Come with me," she said, in a hoarse whisper. He followed her, wondering what the meaning of this new move might be.

"You are mad!" she cried. "They would have pierced your defenceless breast with a dozen stilettos if you had opened that door."

"As well now as later; it is only the difference of a few minutes."

Vivienne paced back and forth, apparently in great distress of mind, as if hesitating between love and duty. Again, the cries were heard outside:

"Open the door, or we shall break it in! Vandemar must die! Blood for blood!"

The assailants had secured possession of a heavy piece of timber, for it was heard to crash against the stout oaken door.

Vivienne clasped her hands and stood as if praying:

"'Never open that door except it be in case of great extremity, and never divulge the secret unless it be to save human life.' Father, thou knowest that the hour of extremity has come, and that a life, dearest to me of all on earth, must be saved."

Again the battering-ram struck against the door, and Vivienne felt that it would not long resist such terrific blows. She drew a paper from her bosom and rapidly scanned it, repeating the words to fix them in her memory. The hinged mirrors were thrown back and the wonderful picture of the Garden of Eden was revealed. Hidden springs were quickly touched, and soon the massive dungeon door creaked, and flew open without the aid of human hands. A noisome vapour came from

the dungeon chamber and all looked black within. Vivienne pointed to the open door:

"It is your only chance for life. You must go in!"

Vandemar looked in, then turned away.

"It is a tomb!" he cried. "I would rather meet my fate here at once, than to suffer slow torture from starvation, and perish at last in a loathsome vault. I will not enter!"

"You do not value your life," cried Vivienne. "If you will not save it for your own sake, I entreat you that you will do it for mine. If I live, I will release you."

Vandemar gave her a questioning look—he did not dare to believe what he had heard.

"You hesitate! You do not believe me!" and there was a plaintive entreaty in her words. "Look in my face and see whether I could treacherously consign you to a death so terrible!"

Vandemar took her face in his hands and looked into her eyes. "Vivienne," he said, slowly, "I would trust you though all the demons of hell were combined to tempt you."

He threw his arms about her—he might never see her again. Perhaps this was their last farewell. He drew her close to him and kissed her upon brow, cheek, and lips. With all the contrariness of woman, even at this crucial moment, she clung to him, for he was the first love of her young life—and this love was so sweet—how could she ever forget those kisses?

Again, with a terrible crash, the battering-ram was brought against the door, impelled by a dozen strong arms and hands. One more such blow and it must give way.

Vivienne threw her arms about Vandemar's neck, but he gently freed himself from her loving embrace. He pulled the dungeon door to after him, but it was still ajar. Vivienne threw herself against it, and the

hidden bolts sprang into their places. Vandemar was safe!

It was with difficulty that she reached the centre of the great room. She knew that she was alone, but, as she looked from side to side, it seemed as though the room was full of weeping women, unhappy as she was herself.

Once more the dull thud of the ram as it struck the oaken door! The iron bolt was torn from its fastenings and the door fell inward. Loud cries of exultation were heard as Pascal, followed by his retainers and the Death Brothers, burst into the room and rushed towards Vivienne.

Pascal grasped her arm roughly:

"You conspire against the honour of your family, faithless girl! Ingrate!! Tell me where you have hidden this villain—the son of him who killed our father."

Vivienne released herself from her brother's hold and looked at him defiantly:

"Pascal, remember that I am your sister. Our father was a gentleman. Do not forget that you are his son."

"Stop!" shouted Pascal. "You are not worthy to speak his name! Tell me where you have hidden this sneaking lover of yours, for, by Heaven, you shall deliver him to us or it will be the worse for you. It was for him, the coward, coming here under a false name, that you trampled upon the love of an honest man and set my wishes at defiance. You false-hearted liar! You are no sister of mine! Hypocrite! Now speak!"

"You see he is not here."

"But you know where he is!"

"I swear to you, Pascal, that I know not at this moment whether he be an inhabitant of earth or heaven. It does not require much time to waft a spirit to the skies."

Her brother's eye caught sight of the blood-stained sword upon the floor:

"Have you killed him? Where is he? I will not believe it until I see his dead body."

"That time may come soon," she replied. She was thinking of Vandemar in the dark dungeon behind her. Then she wondered if the mirrors had been closed. If not, Pascal would see the picture and discover her secret. She could not resist the impulse to turn and look at the dungeon door.

Pascal had waited for her to say more. When she did not, he cried:

"This is but a weak attempt at evasion. You have become an adept in trickery and deception. Now, hear me, Vivienne, and be warned in time. I shall ask you but once more—where is Vandemar?"

Vivienne realised that her entreaties, no matter how strong or how persistent they might be, would have no effect upon her brother, who was animated by the spirit of his race—the spirit of the vendetta—which demands a victim, a sacrifice, an atonement. In her veins flowed the blood of the Batistellis. Now that Vandemar was beyond their reach, she became strong, self-reliant, courageous.

"Find him, if you think I have hidden him! You have the keys of the castle, and see," pointing to the men, sneeringly, "your friends are here to help you; and when you have found him, let your band of Death Brothers chant his dirge."

Pascal advanced towards her, his sword raised in a threatening manner.

"I will have no more of this insolence," he cried. "You shall answer, or I will strike you down!"

His anger was so intense that he might have carried his threat into execution if his followers had not interposed.

"No, no!" cried one, grasping his arm. "Bethink

you, sir. Bethink you, sir, she is a defenceless woman. You must not strike."

Then a chorus of voices arose: "She is your sister. You must not strike."

Pascal let his sword-point fall, but there was no hope of mercy in his voice when he spoke. He evidently had a new project in mind, and was determined to carry it out.

"I will not kill you," he exclaimed, "but he shall die!"

Then he beckoned to one of the men:

"Go tell Doctor Procida to come here at once."

At the mention of the doctor's name, Vivienne's thoughts reverted to Julien:

"Pascal, tell me of Julien! Oh, tell me, is he dead?"

Pascal did not answer. Vivienne appealed to the men: "You will tell me. Is my brother——"

One of the men bowed his head, and she knew the worst.

"Oh Pascal!" she cried, "how can you think of murder, of revenge, when Julien is dead?"

"Your tears are out of place. Why should you weep for one whom you have insulted by unjustly taunting him with cowardice and delay of duty? Have you not reproached him often for not killing the very man whom you now screen from justice?"

Vivienne, who had felt no sorrow at the death of Count Mont d'Oro, now wept unrestrainedly when she learned that her beloved brother Julien was no more.

"I have, I have! Heaven forgive me! I will go to him. I must look into his face again. I will beg him to forgive me. You say he is dead, but when I speak to him, he will come back to life and forgive me, for I loved him, and he loved me."

Pascal smiled grimly, and touched his forehead sig-

nificantly. To one of the men, he said in an undertone: "She has lost her reason."

Vivienne was determined to see Julien. She started towards the door, but Pascal grasped her arm and drew her back:

"Stay! You shall not insult him with your presence."

At that moment, Dr. Procida entered. He was a dapper little man, with small, beady eyes, and was clad in a suit of black. His voice was soft and apologetic, his manners suave; he approached Pascal, bowing low:

"How can I serve you?"

"My worst fears are realised, Doctor," said Pascal. "My poor sister is mad."

The doctor rubbed his hands together—professionally, it seemed to those who saw him; in reality, gleefully—for he was saying to himself: "A thousand francs in my pocket, at least."

"I am not surprised," said the doctor. "The events of the evening have been too much for her sensitive nature, but we will soon have her cured, Monsieur Battistelli. What she needs, and must have, is retirement—rest. Our private asylum at Salvanetra offers the first, and I will see that she gets the other."

"Stop, sir!" cried Vivienne, addressing the doctor. Turning to her brother, she said:

"You cannot mean it! You cannot be so cruel, so utterly heartless, as to carry out such a farce as this! I must be dreaming!"

The doctor nodded his head. Pascal saw the movement and understood.

"I know, I know, my dear," said the doctor. "Yes, it is a dream, but you will be much better when you awake to-morrow. You will get up looking as fresh as a rose, and you shall have a nice drive with my wife. Would you not like to go with me to Salvanetra and see the pretty house in which I live?"

Vivienne turned her face away. She could not answer, for she already loathed the man.

"Doctor," said Pascal, "I wish her to have the best of care."

"All my patients get that," the doctor replied, blandly.

"She is in good bodily health," Pascal continued. "Give her no nostrums. I do not believe in them."

"Neither do I," said the doctor. Until his patients were under his charge, he always agreed with the ideas of their relatives and friends. There is a saying that some persons are "All things to all men," and there are none who so fully exemplify it as those who have charge of the insane.

"Pascal," cried Vivienne, "you mistake me much if you think I will tamely submit to this terrible outrage. I will die first!"

"Ah, monsieur, do not answer her," said the doctor. "She is becoming excited, a condition to be avoided if possible, at least until she is in more suitable quarters."

"I will order the closed carriage, Doctor," said Pascal, "and my servants, who will accompany you, can drive it back to-morrow morning. Come along!" he said to Vivienne, and he attempted to grasp her hand.

Vivienne recoiled: "Now? To-night? You cannot mean to-night, Pascal?"

"I mean now, at once," he cried. "Come!"

"Better try gentleness before using force," Dr. Procida suggested.

"Force? You would not force me from this room? Oh, Pascal, shut me in here, give me bread and water, and naught but the cold stones to lie upon, and I will bless you!"

Pascal turned to Dr. Procida: "Better take her at once."

Then Vivienne appealed to the doctor. "No, no! For the love of Heaven, tell him to leave me here!"

I shall go mad, indeed, if you take me from the castle."

She threw herself at her brother's feet: "Here upon my knees, I beg that you will not send me away from the dear home I love, to live, and eat, and sleep with lunatics. Oh, God! Suffer not a thing so horrible! Torture me, Pascal. I will endure anything at your hands if you will but let me remain here!"

Dr. Procida placed his hand on Pascal's arm: "Gently, monsieur."

Pascal raised Vivienne, and adopted the doctor's suggestion:

"It is for your good, sister. I will come to Salvaterra in two weeks. If your health is restored, you shall come back with me."

"Two weeks! Two weeks!! Oh Heaven! Doctor, tell me, tell me, can one live two weeks without food or drink, without the light of the sun, or moon, or stars?"

"You shall have all you want," the doctor replied, irrelevantly.

"Stop!" she cried; "your voice is like the doom of hell in my ears!"

Pascal and the Doctor each grasped a hand, Vivienne struggling violently to free herself, and they were obliged to let go their hold.

"Oh, Pascal, one word—one word more—one last appeal! Let me see Clarine for one minute, just one! Let me breathe but one word into her ear, and I will go with you quietly. Oh, you will not refuse this, my last request? Say I may, dear brother, oh, say I may!"

The thought had come to her that if she could see her old nurse, tell her where Vandemar was and give her the paper, he might yet escape. Clarine knew all the secret passages in the old castle. Hope still remained. Was the paper safe? Yes, it was there. The

poor girl was nervous, excited, almost distracted. When she withdrew her hand from her bosom, she unknowingly brought the paper with it. It fluttered a moment on the air, and then fell to the floor.

Pascal had been watching her closely. Her action had disclosed the hiding-place of her secret. By this paper, she knew how to open the dungeon door—and now it was in his possession. A look of almost fiendish exultation came into his face. He tore the paper in pieces, threw the fragments upon the floor, and stepped upon them.

Vivienne had seen the paper in Pascal's hands.

"Oh my God!" she had thought, "he will open the dungeon door and kill him!"

With a wild, despairing cry, she threw up her hands, and was falling, senseless, to the stone floor, when the doctor sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

Pascal signed to one of the men to assist the doctor. "Order the carriage," he said to another; then he added: "Go, all of you! I will meet you soon in the reception room. I have something for you to do tomorrow. Manassa, put out the lights."

As he descended the long, steep stairway, he soliloquised:

"It is just as well; it will be a slow and lingering death, while my sword or stiletto would have ended his pain at once. 'Tis better thus, for we shall not have to bury him."

Manassa had heard the last words uttered by Vivienne. Before snuffing the candles, he picked up the pieces of paper and put them in his pocket. When he reached his room, he locked the door.

An hour later, he looked up with a satisfied smile.

"It is all here!" he exclaimed. "I have the secret of the dungeon door. Vandemar shall die by my hand. I will avenge the wrongs of the Batistellis!"



CHAPTER XXV.

THE DUNGEON CHAMBER.

No sooner did Vandemar hear the door of the dungeon chamber close behind him than there came a revulsion of feeling. The conviction forced itself strongly upon him that he was the victim of a plot which had been successful.

He looked about him, but could see nothing. Then he remembered that he had come quickly from a brightly lighted room into a dark one, and it was only natural that his vision should be affected. He must wait until his eyes accommodated themselves to the darkness. No, he would not wait. He would leave the place at once. He turned and retraced his steps, as he supposed, towards the door, but when he reached the wall he could not find it. He followed the seams between the stones with his fingers. The horizontal ones were much longer than those which ran perpendicularly, but they were all too short to indicate the presence of a door. Almost frenzied, he continued the search until his finger-nails were broken and torn by conflict with the rough stones. Still he kept on until the skin was torn from his finger-tips and they were covered with blood. Finally, his search was rewarded, for he came upon a seam which, beginning at the floor, extended higher than he could reach. To make sure, he sought for the hinges, but there were none. Then he remembered that he had read about dungeon doors which swung upon pivots. Perhaps, if he exerted all his strength, he might move it; but he soon desisted, nearly exhausted.

Perhaps she could hear his voice, so he called out: "Vivienne! Vivienne!"

His voice echoed and re-echoed from the walls of the great room. Startled by the unaccustomed noise, several bats, as he supposed they were, flew back and forth, flapping their wings. The sound was not so unpleasant after all. It gave him satisfaction to know that in this dark and noisome dungeon even such unpleasant companions as bats could live. If they could survive, perhaps he could, until his friends rescued him. This thought went through his mind with the rapidity of lightning. He called the name Vivienne a dozen times, but there was no response. Then he beat upon the door with his clenched fists. The blows made no appreciable sound, but he experienced sharp thrills of pain from the concussion.

"Vivienne!" he cried, "give me my sword. If they come to kill me I am unarmed. Give me back my sword so that I may defend myself."

He listened, but there was no sound excepting that produced by the flapping of the bats' wings as they circled about the room. Then all his doubts came back.

"She is faithless! She would not kill me with my own sword when I offered it to her. No, that would have been too easy a death. Both she and her brother decided that my death by starvation would be more to their liking. It would be such a sweet revenge to know that I was dying by inches. Oh, Vivienne, why does God put such fiendish hearts into such angelic forms?"

Man, in his direst distress, always accommodates himself to circumstances and his environment. Thoroughly convinced that his duration of life depended wholly upon himself, and that he could hope for no outside assistance, Vandemar determined to make the best of his condition. Beginning at the door, he followed the wall until he came back to it. He learned that it was rec-

tangular in shape, fully twice as long as it was wide. He proved this by pacing the two distances. Then he walked back and forth, covering the length of the room, groping with his hands in the hope of finding a chair or cot upon which he could rest, but there was no article of furniture in the room.

During his monotonous trips, he made an important discovery. In one corner of the dungeon, far above his reach, was a small window. He imagined that the moon must have been obscured when he entered the dungeon, for when its rays fell upon the window, he had discovered it—but, alas, there was no hope of escape, for it was closely barred. Even if he could wrench those bars from their fastenings, it would avail him nothing, for the dungeon was in the uppermost part of the tower, and he had no rope or other means of descending to the ground.

At last, faint with the loss of blood from his wounds, and overcome by exhaustion and despair, he threw himself upon the cold, damp stones, and was soon lost to consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT SALVANETRA.

TERENCE DEVLIN, who had charge of the Batistelli grounds, was an early riser, as all conscientious gardeners should be. Smoking his pipe, with his spade resting upon his shoulder, he stood regarding an old withered tree.

"Not wan drap av rain finds its way to the roots av this ould giant tree. I do believe it's full nine hundred years ould."

"Terence!"

The gardener turned when he heard his name called, and saw his wife, Snodine, running towards him; if the movement of a woman weighing nearly three hundred pounds could be called running.

"What the devil's the matter?" was the husband-like salutation which greeted her when she met him.

As soon as she could speak, Snodine said: "I've been up to the castle, an' sure it's bad off they be up there. Young Master Julien is as dead as was Father Francis when they took him out of the river where he'd been slapin' for a wake, and the Blessed Virgin prasarve us, it's now goin' on two days since the poor mad craythur was taken away. Pray Heaven the docthors may cure her, for a swater lady niver walked the earth."

"Ah, Snodine, it's a broken heart she has—and whin they tell her the Count is dead——"

"An' do ye think they'll tell her that same? Sure, they'd not be such a pack o' fools."

"'Twas hard enough to lose the brother, poor lad! But the swateheart, Snodine; and they to be marrit so

soon, too. Oh, Lord help the poor mad lady! She loved the Count dearly, they tell me. An' whin is the wake to be for the poor lad, Snodine?"

"To-morrow night. He'll have been dead two days thin."

"It's hard for the livin' brother. An' how does he bear it, Snodine?"

"As he does everything else. Divil a tear, Clarine tould me."

"Well, it's hard to understand the loikes of him."

"It's right ye are," said Snodine. "Niver a tear for the poor mad sister, nor even a wan for the dead brother have he shed yet."

"Just you wait, me darlint, 'til the kayner strikes up the mournin'. It's many a dry eye I've seen over the dead 'til the kayners opened the heart, and thin, faith, the tears came fast enough."

"It's a hard world, indade—a botherin' world," said Snodine, wiping her eyes, sympathetically, with the back of her hand, although there were no tears in them.

"I'm thinkin' that now," said Terence. "Now yer go back, and mind the childer and don't be afther botherin' me whin it's workin' I am."

With these lover-like words Terence again shouldered his spade and walked off towards the maple grove, while Snodine made her way homeward to extend her motherly care to her family of nine, which, when stood in a row according to age, made one think of a flight of stairs.

And what of the mad lady?

Vivienne was borne from the castle in a deep swoon. The events of the evening had been too much for her frail, nervous organisation, and she had succumbed. She was placed in a close carriage, and Dr. Procida took a seat beside her. They were driven rapidly to Sal-

vanetra. The doctor wet Vivienne's lips with brandy, which, together with the cool evening air, that blew in through the open carriage window, soon revived her; but she did not speak. When they reached the doctor's house she was too much exhausted to walk. He called two of his attendants, and she was borne into the house and placed upon a bed in one of the rooms. A nurse was sent to attend her, but she refused her ministrations and was finally left alone. A single candle upon the table gave a flickering light, and filled the room with strange shadows. She heard the bolt slip into place and knew that she was not only a patient but a prisoner.

She passed the most terrible night in her young life. Picture after picture came before her eyes, though she shut them tightly, hoping to escape the phantoms. One by one they followed each other—her friends, with a wreath of roses emblematic of her age—then the music, and singing, and dancing—next, the arrival of Victor and the pleasant conversation they had had at the supper table. So far all was joy and gladness. Then came visions of gloom and misery; the attack upon Victor—his valiant defence—the death of the Count and her brother Julien—the discovery that Victor was Vandemar, the son of the man who had murdered her father—Vandemar in the dungeon chamber, where he must die from starvation unless she could escape and rescue him—her own terrible position, shut off from communication with her friends, on the supposition that she was mad. Could she live through it and not grow mad in reality?

She arose from her bed, took up the sputtering candle, which had burned low, and made a tour of the room—floor and walls of stone, impregnable to any strength which she could exert—windows small, high from ground, and guarded by heavy iron bars—the door of oaken timber, thickly studded with bosses of iron. From such a prison there could be no escape. Strong men

might attempt it, but there was no hope for one so physically weak as she. Vandemar in his dungeon chamber was not more completely isolated from the world. She threw herself upon the bed, and the nurse found her there the next morning, sleeping the sleep which kindly comes to save the worn-out mind and body when their limit of resistance has been reached.

The body of Count Mont d'Oro had been taken to his mother's house and, on the second day after the double tragedy, the remains of Julien Batistelli were placed in the crypt beneath the castle, and those of Count Mont d'Oro, followed by his mother, Miss Renville, and a few friends, were deposited beside the body of his father in the little burying-ground used by the gentry of Alfieri and vicinity.

The night after the funeral, Bertha Renville wrote a long letter to Jennie Glynne. She recounted, in detail, the terrible scenes through which she had passed, and expressed the hope that something would occur to take her away from the terrible place.

"I know that my guardian and Jack," she had written, "both came to Corsica, but I have not seen them. Perhaps they have met and, in the heat of passion, have fought. It may be that either Jack or Mr. Glynne is dead, and sometimes the horrible thought comes to me that their last meeting ended in the death of both. I am filled with a dread which I cannot express. The Countess is kind to me, but we two weak women are virtually defenceless. Oh, my dear, good friend, will this terrible uncertainty ever end? Has the future any happiness in store for me?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TO THE RESCUE!

THE next morning Dr. Procida came to see Vivienne. On her bended knees she implored him to let her go home. She told him that Vandemar was in the dungeon chamber, and that he would die unless she opened the door. She felt in her bosom for the paper and, finding it was gone, burst into hysterical exclamations. The doctor, who was a friend of Pascal, said:

"My poor young lady, you are labouring under an hallucination. You must take a sedative, or you will break down entirely." He placed a bottle upon the table, saying: "I will send the nurse to administer it."

No sooner had he left the room than Vivienne threw the bottle upon the stone floor. "It is a drug," she cried, "and I will not take it."

Dr. Procida told Madeline Villefort, his head nurse, to give the medicine to Vivienne. "I am going away for the day," he continued, "as I have to see a patient in Ajaccio. I shall not be back until late this afternoon."

The nurse went to Vivienne's room. The young girl was strangely calm.

"The doctor has been called away for the day," said Madeline, "and left you in my charge. Where is the medicine?"

Vivienne pointed to the floor.

"You are a rash girl," said the nurse. "When I tell the doctor what you have done, he will put you in a strait-jacket or tie you to your bed."

Vivienne did not notice the woman's words; in fact,

she appeared unconscious of her presence, and seemed lost in thought. Finally, she said in an undertone:

"What a terrible thing is the vendetta!"

"Terrible," cried Madeline, who had overheard her, "I think it is glorious." She drew a stiletto from the bosom of her dress. "Do you see that? I mean it for the woman who stole my husband. Villefort was a fool—I can forgive that—most men are. But she hated me and I hate her. I will kill her if we ever meet."

Vivienne appeared interested. The woman held up the stiletto, looking at the glistening blade and sharp point. Vivienne arose from her chair, walked slowly to the barred window, and looked out. The nurse was too busy with thoughts of prospective vengeance to notice her movements. Vivienne retraced her steps, noiselessly, until she stood behind the chair where Madeline sat. Reaching over suddenly, she grasped the hilt of the stiletto and, with the strength of desperation, tore it from the woman's hand.

"Do not move!" cried Vivienne. "I am going to leave this room and this house." Madeline attempted to rise from her chair. "If you move, I will kill you," cried Vivienne. "His life is everything to me—yours is as nothing."

The nurse had left the door ajar. With a bound, Vivienne reached it, threw it open, and closed it quickly behind her. Then she remembered that the bolt was on the outside, and she pushed it into place. She heard Madeline's cries as she ran down the corridor, and sent back a mocking laugh in response. She saw a side door opening into the garden—perhaps the front door was guarded—she would run no risks. Keeping her hand upon the hilt of the stiletto, she made her way through the garden, for she saw the *maquis* beyond. If she could reach that, she might rest until able to go on.

In the heart of the forest she sank down, exhausted;

but the young recuperate quickly, and she was soon up and again on her way, towards Ajaccio she hoped. She had never studied astronomy, but from the position of the sun she reasoned that she must go in a certain direction, and events proved that her intuition was correct. She soon came to a narrow cross-road, which she followed, and in a short time found herself on what she thought must be the main street of Salvanetra.

Vivienne would have turned back from the travelled thoroughfare and tried to make her way through the paths in the *maquis*, but for two reasons: She was afraid she might be captured by a party of bandits who, knowing that her brother was wealthy, would hold her for a large ransom; again, she was faint and almost exhausted, for she had refused to eat anything while in Dr. Procida's asylum. She stood irresolute for a while; then soliloquised:

"I must gain strength so that I may get back in time to save Vandemar; and to gain strength I must have food."

She walked on, scanning carefully each house that she passed, yet undecided as to which she should apply for assistance. Espying in the road a small branch of a tree, which had probably been used by some carter as a whip, she picked it up, and using it as a staff, got on her way much faster.

She saw that she was nearing a line of houses and felt that she must put pride away and make her appeal. She tapped lightly upon a door with her staff. It was opened by a woman, whose face had a sharp, shrewish expression. Vivienne's first impulse was to turn away, but summoning all her strength and courage, she said:

"Will you be so kind, madame, as to give me a piece of bread? I am so tired and faint, for I have eaten nothing since yesterday."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, do not ask me my name. I am not a beggar. Believe me, I am not what I seem. Only give me a crust and I will go."

"Honest people are not afraid to tell their names," said the woman, and her voice was harsh and repellent.

"It is because I am honest that I do not tell you my name. I might give you one easily, but it would not be my own."

"Then go away!" cried the woman. "No doubt you have been turned away from some farmhouse for drunkenness, theft, or something of that sort. Be off with you!" and she slammed the door.

Vivienne had on the simplest and coarsest dress that belonged to her. Her brother Pascal had thoughtfully sent some of her clothing in the carriage, and although he had not made the selections his sister would have wished, yet he could not have done better, for Vivienne had determined, from the first, to escape from the asylum, and the unpretending costume which she wore served her purpose much better than the one in which she had looked so beautiful at her birthday party would have done.

Vivienne turned away from the door sick at heart. "Oh, Pascal, I could wish you no greater punishment for your sin against your wretched sister than for you to have heard those terrible words."

Her head was aching and she pressed both hands upon her forehead:

"No, I must not sink down here in the street; they would shut me up in the jail. I will—I must obtain food. Even a morsel would give me strength to reach him. Why should I die with the cool fresh air about me, and the sun giving me light, while he is shrouded in darkness and dying from hunger and thirst in a living tomb? Oh, Vandemar, Vandemar, I will not die!

There is a kind soul in this house, for I hear the laughter of children. A mother's heart is always open to pity."

A man servant appeared at the door. "What is your business here, my good woman?"

"Oh, sir, I am very hungry. Give me some food and Heaven will bless you!"

"My mistress is sick," said the man, "but I will send the housekeeper to you."

"Thank you; you are very kind." Vivienne leaned against the door-post. "I—I cannot stand; my strength is deserting me." As she sank on the doorstep, a woman appeared.

"Well, what is wanted?" was her query. "Begging, I suppose."

"I wish only for a piece of bread, madame. You will surely not refuse me. I have walked so far and I am faint and tired—oh, so very tired. I pray that you will give me something, even the poorest crust from your table."

"I understand it all—you have escaped from the asylum. Where are you going?"

"To my home at Ajaccio," Vivienne answered. "Oh, madame, do not question me, but give me food. I—I feel strangely—I am——"

"She is fainting," said the man; "I will bring her a glass of water."

The woman looked at Vivienne closely and said:

"Your pretty face ought to win you bread, if not jewels. You are a fool to go begging, with such beauty as yours. If I had your face and form I would ride in my carriage. There would be no more house drudgery for me."

Vivienne drank the water, which was cool and refreshing. A little girl, who had been regarding her from the opposite side of the road, came running across and said:

"Come with me, poor woman. My mamma is away, but cook will give you something to eat. She is good to everybody, and so is my mamma. Come!"

"Bless you, sweet child!" said Vivienne, rising.

The woman resented the child's interference: "You are a forward little minx! As though I would refuse her food! Come in, and I will give you all you want."

Vivienne looked at the woman, her great black eyes full of the loathing she felt.

"After what you have said? No, madame, food from your hands would choke me."

Vivienne turned away, took the little girl's hand, and they walked slowly towards the pretty little cottage to which the child pointed, saying over and over again: "That's where mamma lives."

Vivienne had no sooner reached the house where she had been promised food and rest than her head swam, she lost consciousness, and fell helpless upon the floor. When she revived she heard the sound of voices. She opened her eyes and saw that she was in a darkened room. An old gentleman sat beside her, while a lady, with a kind, motherly look upon her face, stood at the foot of the bed regarding her.

"You are better, my dear. The doctor, here, said that if you awoke in your right mind all would be well. You are better, are you not?"

Vivienne could not resist answering a question put so pleasantly.

"I am feeling quite well, madame," she replied. Then in an instant all came back to her. She raised herself in bed and cried:

"Where am I? Have I been sick? For God's sake, dear lady, tell me how long I have been here."

"My little daughter brought you here three days ago," was the answer.

"Three days! Three days!!" moaned Vivienne. "It is too late now. He is dead—dead!"

"But you are living," said the doctor. "Who is dead? I do not understand you."

"Oh," cried Vivienne, "I must tell you all, for I know that I can trust you. If I do not, you will not know what I mean. I am Vivienne Batistelli, of Alfieri."

"I thought so," said the lady in an undertone.

"You know of the vendetta between the Batistellis and the Della Coscias?"

The doctor nodded.

"Vandemar Della Coscia came back to Corsica. His identity was discovered by my brother Pascal. Vandemar has been in the dungeon chamber for five days without food or drink. I am the only one who can open the dungeon door and release him. I must go to him at once. Help me! Help me!! He must not die!"

"What can we do, Doctor?" asked the lady.

"My horse and carriage are at the door. My dear young lady, get ready at once, and I will take you to Alfieri."

When Vivienne reached the castle, she at once sought Clarine, who was overjoyed at seeing her again.

"Where have you been?" she asked, excitedly.

"I cannot stop to tell you now," said Vivienne. "Where is my brother Pascal?"

"That I do not know," was the reply. "He has gone away."

"Oh, Clarine," said Vivienne, "I must open the door of the dungeon chamber, but I have lost the paper that you gave me. Have you found it?"

"Why, no," said Clarine, "but I surmise, from what he has let drop, that Manassa knows something about it."

"Where can I find him?" asked Vivienne.

"I do not know," said Clarine, "but if he has it he will not give it to you. He says you are no longer a

Batistelli—that you love a Della Coscia and have disgraced your name.”

“Oh, Clarine, I shall pray to God to give me back my memory, so that I may open that door and save his life——” and she ran from the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ WE WILL DIE TOGETHER ! ”

VIVIENNE went from room to room, calling loudly for Manassa, but there was no answer. Espying Terence at work in the garden, she asked him if he had seen Manassa. He answered her politely in the negative, but said, in an undertone:

“ No, the old omadhaun; an’ may the divil fly away wid him before I do.”

At last Vivienne reached the foot of the long flight of stone steps that led to the Hall of Mirrors. She sank down exhausted; she was unused to such great physical exertion, besides being almost mentally distracted when she thought how powerless she was to save Vandemar without the help of one who, she knew, hated him as intensely as did her own brother.

At length, she arose and, going to an open window, again called loudly for Manassa; but there was no response. Sick at heart, she turned away from the window and went slowly up the steps.

At sight of the closed door of the dungeon chamber, her forced composure gave way. She ran to it and beat wildly against it until the blood oozed through the tender skin; then she sank upon her knees. She raised her clasped hands to Heaven and cried:

“ Oh, *mon Dieu!* Give me back my memory but for one moment. Pardon me, *mon Dieu*, not for what I say, but for the way I say it. I learned the instructions in the paper by heart, but they called me mad, and I have forgotten them. Then I fell sick, and all is a

blank. Oh, *mon Dieu*, give me back my memory, that I may save a precious life. Oh, my dear father in heaven, entreat the good God, who is God of Love and Mercy, to help me!"

Full of her simple faith, she arose and stood before the door, as though expecting to see it open of its own accord; but there it stood, immovable, relentless, merciless. She regarded it for a time with a helpless, dazed look. Then there came a revulsion, and the weak woman, with a feeble voice, was transformed into a new creature; for the time being she was mad, and, with that madness came the fictitious physical and mental strength, the showing of which deceives all but those who are acquainted with such manifestations of mania.

"I must open it," she cried; "I will! I will!! Oh, father! father!! Clarine! Clarine!! Where are you? Where is Manassa? He is lost—lost! Come listen, Clarine—come! Five days, Clarine, five long days and nights! Dear God, one long night—one hundred and twenty hours of darkness; no food, no drink, and naught but the cold stones to lie upon.

"I see him now, with his eyes turned towards that merciless door; watching, praying for the ray of light that never comes; waiting for the sound of the voice that promised to save him; listening for the step he can never hear.

"Oh, I shall go mad! Mad!! Vandemar! Vandemar!! It is I, Vivienne. I have come to save you, but the cruel walls will not let me in. Speak to me, Vandemar. Tell me that you live. I am coming—coming!"

Again she struck the wall, frantically, with her bleeding hands:

"He is dead! I see him—I see the black, crawling things—they are fighting over him—they are feeding upon his forehead—back, back, back! Back, I say!

They are tearing his flesh—hark! They are feasting royally. No, no, no! Spare him—spare him! He is mine, mine!"

She stamped her feet upon the stone floor: "I will crush you, you ravenous reptiles, despoilers of the dead; cold, venomous worms! Brush them away, Vandemar! Keep them back, beloved, for I am coming—coming to save you."

Again, as though under the influence of an ungovernable passion, she struck the wall until the sense of intense pain obliged her to desist. Then came another revulsion. From a state of exaltation, she fell into one approaching stupor, and for some time seemed unconscious of her surroundings, of time, and of the terrible errand which had brought her there. Was this condition of quietude to be followed by another outburst of passion, or was she so exhausted that further effort would be impossible?

Suddenly, she awoke from her lethargy and listened intently. No, yes it was—she could not be mistaken—the sound of footsteps upon the stone stairway. Hope revived. Clarine had found Manassa and had sent him to open the door for her. But would he? He hated Vandemar. Perhaps he was coming only for the purpose of finding out if his enemy were dead. Madness always engenders suspicion. She would be cautious. If he opened the door, she would force him to let her in. She would fly to Vandemar—nothing should prevent her.

Behind one of the mirrors which, when thrown back, exposed the door of the dungeon chamber, Vivienne hid herself.

Pascal Batistelli was a brave man. He preferred to carry out his purposes by diplomacy rather than warfare, but it was only natural, after the tragic events which had deprived him of both a friend and a brother,

that his heart should be filled with thoughts of vengeance—and, to a Corsican, vengeance and death are closely related terms. Vandemar was in the dungeon chamber and his death from starvation was certain. Vivienne was securely locked up in a madhouse and could not interfere with his plans. But there was one man, still living, who must die before his vengeance would be complete, so he gathered a large body of his adherents and started out in quest of Cromillian.

Old Manassa was a curious individual. At times, he seemed to be in his dotage, his memory gone, while his words were often childish and, more often, foolish. At other times, he seemed to have recovered all his youthful shrewdness and sagacity. He constantly bewailed the passing of the "good old times," and often declared himself more worthy to be the head of the Batistelli family than Pascal, whom he looked upon as the degenerate son of a noble sire.

Now that Pascal was away, Manassa assumed all the airs, and, also, the powers of the lord of the manor. He considered that the honour of the Batistelli family was in his keeping and gloried in the fact that his enemy was in the dungeon chamber, condemned to a slow and horrible death from starvation.

Manassa was not only revengeful, but vindictive. He was not satisfied to allow his enemy to die in peace, even by slow torture. No, he would tempt him, taunt him, and then revile him. These acts would make his vengeance more satisfactory. So, he filled a basket with the most enticing food that he could find, put in a bottle of choice wine, and then made his way to the Hall of Mirrors.

Vivienne could hardly refrain from uttering an exclamation of delight when she saw him bearing the basket of food. Manassa was a good man, he was merciful, he had relented, and Vandemar was saved! She

would have sprung forward and embraced him, so great was her joy, but there was a look on his face which chilled her blood, and she stood as if frozen to the spot. His expression was demoniac—but for what purpose had he brought the food? With every sense alert, Vivienne watched and listened.

Manassa placed the basket upon the floor, then took a piece of paper from his pocket—the instructions for opening the door of the dungeon chamber! Should she rush from her hiding-place, tear it from him, and open the door herself? No, she would let him do that. She would save what strength she had for what might come afterward.

With much difficulty, Manassa succeeded in opening the door:

"Vandemar! Vandemar Della Coscia! I have brought you some food and a nice bottle of wine. You must be hungry. Come and eat." The words were spoken in a taunting tone, which belied their meaning. There was no response, and the old man laughed, mockingly.

"If I were not so old," said he, "I would bring it to you; but, if you cannot come for it, you will have to go without it. I am so sorry, my good Vandemar, for I am sure you must be very hungry."

After hearing these sarcastic words and, again, that horrible, mocking laugh, Vivienne could restrain herself no longer. With a cry like that of a tigress, she leaped upon old Manassa and hurled him to the floor. He was stunned by the fall and lay motionless. Vivienne took up the basket of food and tried to carry it, but her strength failed her and she was obliged to put it down upon the floor again. Then she grasped one side of it and was pulling it towards the dungeon door, when Manassa revived and saw who his assailant had been. He quickly divined her evident purpose to take the food to Vandemar. He did not try to regain his feet, but

crawled upon his hands and knees until he was able to grasp the other side of the basket.

It was literally a contest for life or death—to Vandemar. Manassa was the stronger, and Vivienne felt herself being drawn slowly away from the dungeon door. In her fury, she drew from her bosom the stiletto which she had taken from Madeline Villefort and, making a desperate lunge, stabbed Manassa in the arm. With a cry of pain, he released his hold upon the basket. Vivienne, full of exultation, dragged it along the stone floor and pulled it into the dungeon chamber.

Manassa scrambled to his feet and stood, for a moment, uncertain what course to pursue. Then that look of demoniac wickedness, which had so startled Vivienne, came into his face again. He chuckled—a savage, unearthly sound:

“She loves her enemy. She is no longer a Batistelli, but a Della Coscia—and she shall die with him!”

Summoning all his strength, he closed the great door, and then, with the blood streaming from his wound, shambled from the room. Again that mocking laugh and those revengeful words:

“She is no longer a Batistelli—she is a Della Coscia. She shall die with him!”

When Vivienne entered the dungeon chamber, her thoughts were of Vandemar, and of him alone. Was he alive or dead? The darkness was so intense that she could discern nothing. Where was he? She listened for some sound which might indicate in what part of the room he was. When the great door was closed behind her by Manassa, she had not heard. She stood irresolute, not knowing in which direction to proceed. Her eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, she perceived a faint ray of light piercing the gloom.

“Vandemar,” she cried, “are you there, near the light?”

Although there was no response to her question, she made her way towards the beam of light, the only sign of hope in what she feared—and that fear made her hold her breath—was the chamber of death.

Suddenly, her foot struck against something. She reached down and placed her hand upon it. It was the body of a man—it must be that of Vandemar. She longed to give relief to her pent-up feelings—she could have screamed with delight at finding him—but no, that would do no good. If he were alive, he must have wine and food.

She placed her hand upon his heart; it was beating, though but faintly. She knelt—she could feel his breath upon her cheek—he was alive! With a loud cry of joy which she could not repress, she leaped to her feet. Wandering aimlessly for a while, she sought ineffectually for the basket of food. Again guided by the ray of light, she made her way back to where Vandemar lay. Following along by the wall, which she touched lightly with her hands, she came to the corner opposite the small window. Still keeping close to the wall, she reached the dungeon door. There she stopped to collect her thoughts; but, even then, it did not occur to her that the door was closed; and, if it had, her memory would not have told her that there was no way of opening it from the inside.

In her mind there was but one thought, one desire—to find the food and wine. Although Manassa had brought it only to tantalise the helpless prisoner, in her heart she almost forgave him, for it meant life—and with life would come safety—for Vandemar, her beloved.

Feeling that every moment was precious, she resumed her search and soon stumbled over the basket, which she had left not ten feet from the door. Keeping her eyes upon the ray of light, which was her guiding star, she pulled the basket across the stone floor until she

once more came in contact with the almost lifeless form.

She remembered that she had read somewhere that but little food, at first, should be given to starving persons, but the wine—there was life in that! The bottle was tightly corked and she could not open it. She struck it against the stone wall and the neck fell to the floor. She dipped her fingers in the wine and wet Vandemar's lips with it. There was bread in the basket. She moistened it with the wine and, raising his head from the floor, fed him as she would have a child.

Vivienne could not see his face, for the ray of light did not reach the dark corner beneath the window, but the bread and wine did their good work, and Vandemar, reviving, heard the soft tones of a woman's voice—a voice which kept repeating:

"Vandemar, come back to me. Vandemar, you are saved. It is I, Vivienne."

There was more inspiration, more strength, in that voice than bread or wine could give.

"Vivienne? Is it really you, Vivienne? Have the guests all left the castle? May I go now? The Admiral and his daughter and I are going back to the ship to-night. What time is it? I must have fallen asleep. I tried to keep awake because you said you would come for me."

"I have come, as I promised I would," she said. "I have brought you wine and food. You must drink some of the wine and, when you feel stronger, you may have something to eat; but not very much, for your fast has been a long one and it would not be safe to eat too heartily."

The stimulant warmed him and sent the life-blood coursing through his veins. He sat upright, without support, and when he spoke, his voice was stronger and fuller. Then he seemed to remember what he had at



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first forgotten—that many days, and not one night, had elapsed since he had entered the dungeon.

"Oh," he said, "I have had both food and drink. I have not suffered for want of either. My wound gave me a fever. That is what has made me so weak, but I shall soon be well, and we will leave this place."

"Yes, Vandemar, we will go. But tell me, for I cannot understand, how did you get both food and drink?"

"I have not been alone," said Vandemar. "I have had some good friends. They came at night—it has been all night here—and fetched me kernels of corn—and once they brought an egg. That saved my life. They were so tame, too. It was so dark they could not see me. Perhaps they thought I was one of them—so old and feeble that I could not go with them to the kitchen to get my own food."

"But the drink?" cried Vivienne. "How did you get anything to drink? The rats could not bring water to you."

"No," said Vandemar, "I had to get that myself, and that was much harder. It rained one night and some drops were blown in at the window and fell upon me. I was feverish and knew that I must have water. I tore my sword scarf into strips and knotted them together. Then I tied one end to the sleeve of my coat and finally succeeded in throwing it so that it lodged between the window-bars. When it was saturated, I pulled it down, wrung it and drank my fill."

"Do you feel stronger?" asked Vivienne.

"Why, yes. I am almost as good as ever. I must have been asleep when you came in. I had a bad dream. I thought your brother sent you away from the Castle so that you could not come and let me out."

"He did," cried Vivienne, "and for that I shall never forgive him. He told Doctor Procida that I was mad, and they took me to the lunatic asylum at Salva-

netra, but I escaped the next day. Then I fell ill and, for three days, I knew nothing. To-day is the fifth day and I thought you must be dead, for I had not faith enough in God to believe that He would send His dumb creatures to feed you and rain from Heaven for you to drink. I have been so wicked—but now that God in His mercy has brought us together again, we will be good—will we not, Vandemar?”

“Give me more of that wine, Vivienne. It is very good, and you are the best woman I ever knew. With good wine and a good woman, no man should be bad.”

“Hush, Vandemar,” said Vivienne; “do not speak so. We should be good because we ought to be and not because we get what we wish for. Come, come, let us be going. My brother is away and you must get to a place of safety before he returns. Give me your hand. I will lead you, for I know how to find the door.”

When they reached it, the terrible truth dawned upon her. She stood rooted to the spot—she could not speak.

“Open the door quickly, Vivienne,” he said, and he had never spoken so gently before. “This has been a long night, Vivienne, and my couch was not a soft one. Open the door, for I yearn to see the blue sky, the trees, and the flowers, and hear the songs of birds. Then, too, I would look out upon the water and see my good ship riding at anchor. How glad the Admiral will be to see me, and how interested Helen will be to hear of my adventures—and how Heaven sent my good angel to rescue me and make me happy for life. I will take you to England, Vivienne, where there is no cruel vendetta—but why do you not open the door?”

“My God!” she cried, and her voice was tense with pain, “I cannot.”

“Let me try,” he said, “I am stronger than you are. Tell me how to open it.”

“We are lost!” she moaned. “I had forgotten—the door cannot be opened from the inside.”

“What? You forgot? We are lost?” There was passion, suspicion, despair, in the words.

“I left it open when I came in. Some one must have closed it.”

“Some one must have closed it?” His voice was harsh, and there was unbelief in the question. “Speak, Vivienne, who could have closed it? Who was with you? You said your brother had gone away, and even he would not close a dungeon door upon his only sister.”

“I will tell you all,” she said, piteously.

“I think the time has come,” was the stern reply.

“Pascal took the paper from me, which told how to open the door, and tore it in pieces. I had learned the instructions by heart before they took me to the asylum, but when I came back my memory was gone. I should have died outside the door, and you would have perished in here, had not Old Manassa brought a basket of food. He did not mean to give it to you, for he hates you because you are a Della Coscia. He came to taunt you, but I sprang upon him and stabbed him with my stiletto. I wrenched the basket from him. After I came in, he must have closed the door. Oh, Vandemar! After all our pain and suffering, to have it end thus!”

There was silence for a time, then Vandemar spoke, but there were no love tones in his voice:

“Does no one know that you are here? Did you not tell some one that you were coming to release me?”

“As I came through the garden, some one called my name, but I do not know who it was. I did not look. I thought only of you, I wished only to see you, for I would give my life to save you, Vandemar—but you do not believe me, you do not trust me, you do not love me——”

Vandemar put his arms about the weeping girl and drew her close to him.

"Forgive me, Vivienne; I am racked in mind and body, and am not myself. What I said just now was unjust and unkind to you. Believe me, dear one, the Vandemar that was, would never have harboured a thought or spoken a word to bring tears to those sweet eyes. I cannot see them, but I know they are filled with the love-light which neither time nor death can dim. Do you not believe, Vivienne, that, if God wishes us to live and be happy together in this world, He will send us help?"

"I do," said Vivienne. "We will hope on, will we not, Vandemar? We have food and wine, your little friends will bring us corn and eggs, and the good God will send us rain that we may drink. I am with you, and you with me. We can love each other as well in this dark dungeon as we could if we sat beneath the trees, with the birds singing above us. That love will bless us, and if no one comes to save us, you will kiss me for the last time, tell me that you love me, and, clasped in each other's arms, we will die together!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DOUBLE VENDETTA.

PASCAL BATISTELLI and his adherents were unsuccessful in their search for Cromillian and his moral bandits. If they had not been looking for each other, they might have met, for while Pascal sought for Cromillian in the *maquis*, the bandit chief, with a picked body of men, Jack De Vinne being one of the company, was on his way to Batistelli Castle with the fixed determination of finding Vandemar, or of exacting stern retribution if the young man had been foully dealt with.

Pascal dismissed his followers, telling them that they must go home and take needed rest, for he should soon call upon them again. He maintained his usual composure before them, but, after their departure, in the solitude of his library, he felt utterly disheartened. Then his thoughts turned to Manassa, and he sent Adolphe to summon his old retainer.

"What is the matter?" cried Pascal, as the old man entered. "What has happened to you? Why is your arm bound up? There is blood upon your clothing." He paused. "Has Vandemar escaped? Sit down, Manassa, and tell me who did this."

The old man seated himself.

"Vandemar has not escaped," he began. "He is safe in the dungeon—" he gave a low chuckle—"but he is not alone."

"Not alone?" cried Pascal. "Who is with him? Come, quick, tell me all," and, unthinkingly, he grasped Manassa's wounded arm, making him wince with pain.

"It is a long story," said Manassa, "and I don't know just how to put it together. I thought that Van-

demar might be hungry, having had nothing to eat for five days, so I took him a basket of food and a bottle of good wine."

"You fool!" cried Pascal. Then he remembered. "What was there in that? You could not open the dungeon door."

"Oh, yes, I could." The old man chuckled again. "I was in the Hall of Mirrors when you tore up that paper. After all of you were gone, before I put out the lights, I picked up the pieces and pasted them together. Nobody knows I have it but Vivienne."

"Vivienne? How could she know anything about it, locked up at Salvanetra?"

"Yes, she was locked up," mused the old man. "I don't know how she got away, but she did."

Pascal started to his feet. "Vivienne here? Where is she? Did you give her the food to take to Vandemar? I thought you were a friend to the Batistellis."

"I didn't mean to give it to her," and Manassa wrung his hands, apologetically; "I didn't mean to give it to him. I had opened the door, was telling him what nice things I had for him,—just to make him feel hungrier than ever,—when Vivienne came from behind one of the mirrors and caught at the basket. Just as I was getting it away from her, she drew a stiletto and stabbed me here," and he placed his hand upon his wounded arm. "I fell, and before I could get up again, she had dragged the basket of food into the dungeon chamber."

"What did you do then?" asked Pascal, excitedly.

"I did as I thought you would have done—I shut the door and left them there together. She is no longer a Batistelli—she is a Della Coscia. Let them die together!"

"You were right, Manassa. I should have done as you did. But where is the paper?"

"Here it is," and Manassa passed it to him.

"Come with me, Manassa," said Pascal. "She is

my sister—a poor, weak, foolish woman. It is my duty to give her one more chance to repent of her folly, and I must have a witness.”

“Vivienne, are you there?”

There were tones in her brother's voice which the young girl could not mistake. The prisoners had gone back to the corner beneath the window, for the friendly ray of light made the dungeon seem less like a tomb.

Vivienne sprang to her feet. “Yes, Pascal, I am here,” she cried, joyfully, “and Vandemar is so strong now that he can walk.”

“Come here to the door,” said Pascal.

“What is it?” she asked, when she reached it.

“Come with me,” said her brother.

“I will bring Vandemar.”

“No,” said Pascal, “if you come out you shall come alone. You must renounce that man.”

“Then I will not come,” said Vivienne, positively. “I love him. We will either live together or die together.”

“Is that your final answer?” questioned Pascal, angrily.

“It is,” she said.

He drew his stiletto.

“I do not fear that,” she cried. “You may kill me, but I will give you no other answer. I will not leave here without Vandemar.”

While they had been talking Pascal had stepped within the dungeon door, still holding the paper.

“So be it!” he cried.

An instant later the door was closed and Vivienne knew that she and Vandemar were doomed to a lingering death.

Manassa had been an interested observer: “I was right, was I not, master? She is no longer a Batistelli—she is a Della Coscia. Let them die together.”

"Let them die together," echoed Pascal, but although he spoke the words, he knew that they did **not** come from his heart.

"Master, where is the paper?"

Pascal searched his garments; then they both looked in every direction, but it could not be found. A feeling of remorse seized Pascal. He had not meant to go so far. He knew that they had food and he would have come again. He wished for Vandemar's death, but if he did not love her, he was proud of his sister. Now she must die, and by his hand.

"Have you found the paper?" the old man asked again.

"I must have dropped it as I came out of the dungeon, and the great door closed over it."

"That is good," said Manassa. "Then the vendetta is ended. A life for a life. Two Della Coscias for one Batistelli—for she is no longer a Batistelli."

"Come, Manassa, you will bear witness that I gave her a chance for life."

As Pascal turned to leave the Hall of Mirrors, to his surprise he was confronted by Cromillian. Pascal was filled with fury at the sight of him.

"What brings you here, robber, murderer?" he demanded.

Cromillian replied coolly: "Well, I don't mind telling you I have come on a tour of investigation. You asked me a question and I have answered it. Now I will match yours with another. Where is Vandemar?"

Pascal dissembled: "I cannot be expected to know the whereabouts of all those who have been my guests."

"Your guest!" said Cromillian, sneeringly. "I have my suspicions that he has been foully dealt with. He has not been seen since you and your host of ruffians that are called Death Brothers attacked him here in your own house. The world has been able to give us credit but for one thing—that is, the virtue of hospi-

talitv; that law has ever been held sacred by Corsicans, as you well know. You have basely violated it, and thereby brought dishonour and shame upon your countrymen. By all that is holy, when Cromillian brutalises his manhood to that extent, may the very heavens fall and crush him!"

Pascal drew his stiletto. "You murdered my brother, villain, and you dare preach to me!"

"You lie! I but defended an innocent life. Your brother fell by his own rashness. It is one thing to assassinate your enemy—that requires little bravery; it is another to face your foe like a man and give him a chance for his life. My sword is longer than your stiletto, and I could murder you easily."

He unbuckled his sword belt and threw it with the sword and scabbard upon the stone floor. Then he drew his stiletto, and the two men stood facing each other, for each knew that but one of them could leave that room alive.

Cromillian was the stronger man, but much heavier and slower in his movements than Pascal, who was muscular and agile. For a time it was a drawn battle. Skill parried strength, and strength overcame skill. Then happened that which has happened so often before—it was a question of endurance, and the stronger man could endure the most. Pascal lost his head and struck wildly, aimlessly.

"I could kill you now," said Cromillian, "but I will spare your life if you will tell me where I can find Vandemar."

Pascal pointed to the dungeon door. "He is there with my sister Vivienne. She loves him, and I have given her to him."

"She is no longer a Batistelli," croaked Old Manassa; "she is a Della Coscia. Let them die together."

"Open that door," said Cromillian, with an air of command.

"You forget," said Pascal, "that this is my castle. I am master here and take orders from no one."

"I forget nothing," replied Cromillian. "I know that you are a heartless, inhuman wretch, and the would-be murderer of two innocent hearts. I say to you again, open that door."

"I would not if I could," was Pascal's defiant response; "but the instructions for opening the dungeon door have been lost—the door can never be opened."

To Cromillian's mighty strength was now added the fury of despair. "I do not believe you!" he cried. "You shall die with that lie upon your lips."

There were a few hurried passes, an intertwining and glistening of the sharp blades, and that of Cromillian pierced Pascal's heart. As Cromillian started to leave the room, his eyes fell upon Manassa.

"I ought to send you to join your master, for I believe you are as wicked at heart as he was, but you are an old man and powerless to defend yourself. It would be murder to kill you. But they shall be saved." He pointed to the dungeon door. "I shall come back with my men. We will pull this castle down; I will not leave one stone standing upon another."

After Cromillian had gone, Manassa picked up the sword and buckled the belt about his waist. What he did next would have surprised Cromillian if he had seen it. The old man took up the dead body of his master, clasped it firmly in his arms, and carried it slowly, step by step, down the long stone stairway, then farther down until he reached the library. Placing the body upon a low couch, he fell upon his knees beside it. Raising his right hand, he cursed the Della Coscias, he cursed Cromillian, and swore vengeance against him who had caused his master's death.

"The Della Coscias are dead—so are the Batistellis. I am master now!"

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

THOMAS GLYNNE knew that Jack De Vinne had gone with Cromillian and his party, though he did not know for what purpose. Doubt engenders suspicion, and he came to the conclusion that Cromillian had decided to espouse Jack's cause, and had taken him to Ajaccio so that he could meet with Bertha.

Glynne was well provided with money, and it was in that shape which passes current in all lands—honest gold coins; he did not have to look far before he found one of the bandits who was willing to make an exchange, and Glynne soon learned what he most wished to know—the shortest and safest road to Ajaccio.

One night, Glynne, at his purchased friend's suggestion, was put on guard. While his companions were sleeping soundly, in supposed safety, Glynne stole away in the darkness.

It was not quite daylight when he came suddenly upon Cromillian's party, encamped in the *maquis*. A sleepy guard called to him, but receiving no reply, and still hearing the noise of his approach, fired in his direction. There was the sound of a falling body, then all was still. The sentry shortly reconnoitred and came upon the body of Thomas Glynne, who had been shot through the heart. He resumed his post, and it was not until morning that he informed his fellow bandits that he had called to the person, and, receiving no answer, supposed he was a spy, and had fired in his direction, as it proved, with unerring aim.

Among those to whom he told his story was Jack

De Vinne, whose curiosity led him to look upon the supposed spy. He was startled beyond measure when he found that it was Bertha's guardian, Thomas Glynne.

Jack was brave and resolute, but he could not look upon that still form with complacency. Bertha was deprived of her appointed protector. What would she say when she learned the truth? Jack thought that the least he could do was to give the body a decent burial and, with the assistance of some of the band, Thomas Glynne was interred near where he had been shot. Before this was done Jack took such papers as Glynne had upon him, thinking possibly there might be something of value to Bertha. Nor was he mistaken. To his surprise, he found the last will and testament of Oscar Renville and what he opined were other valuable papers in reference to her estates.

He went at once to the leader of the band, one Giuseppe Pisano, who had been appointed in place of the recreant Paoli, and explained the matter to him.

"I must go to Ajaccio," said Jack, "and take this document to the dead man's ward. It is of great importance, and it is my duty to take it at once. I know our good Captain would agree to it if he were here."

Lieutenant Pisano gave him permission to go to Ajaccio, first exacting a promise that after having performed his mission, he would report to Cromillian, who was encamped in the *maquis* near Alfieri.

It would be hard to explain Jack's feelings. They were an admixture of remorse, fear, hope, and love. He was sorry that Bertha's guardian had been killed, even though he might be a villain and false to the trust imposed on him by Bertha's father, and he was sorry for Clarence.

As a lover, his heart was full of happiness, for was he not to see Bertha after a separation which had seemed almost an eternity? He concealed the papers about his

person, and set out with a light heart to find Bertha, vowing that they never should be parted again.

After Cromillian had killed Pascal, he declared his intention of demolishing the Batistelli castle if there were no other means of rescuing Vandemar and Vivienne. To do this, he must have the assistance of his followers, who were encamped in the *maquis* about a mile from the village.

Before entering the castle, he had hidden his rifle in the shrubbery, for, if possible, he wished to make his visit a peaceful one. For this reason, he had come alone to see Pascal, hoping to induce him to release Vandemar and, perhaps, bring about a truce, thus preventing more bloodshed. In this he had failed. Vandemar and Vivienne were in the dungeon chamber, and the demolition of the castle seemed to be the only way in which their lives could be saved.

Cromillian walked along, his rifle over his shoulder, unconscious of imminent danger. He was thinking of the most expeditious manner in which the walls of the castle could be so breached as to make the rescue of the lovers possible, when he felt a stinging, smarting sensation between his shoulders. Instantly his throat filled with blood, he choked, a momentary weakness overcame him, and he fell to the ground; but he was a man of large stature and great muscular strength. With the revulsion that followed such a severe physical shock, came the desire to be revenged upon his assailant, for he knew that an attempt had been made to assassinate him.

Grasping his rifle, which had fallen from his hand, he gave a quick, energetic lurch to his body, which enabled him to face in the opposite direction to that in which he had been walking. Not twenty feet from him, Cromillian saw an old man, with long white hair, who was brandishing a sword—his own sword, for there was not another like it in Corsica—it was old Manassa!

"A life for a life!" he cried. "The Batistellis are avenged!"

The old man turned and, with surprising agility, ran in the direction of a thick grove of trees. A moment later he would have vanished from sight. With an almost superhuman effort, Cromillian raised his rifle and fired. A yell of pain was proof that the bullet had struck, but the wound was not a mortal one. Old Manassa kept on and disappeared among the trees.

The exertion was too much for Cromillian; his throat again filled with blood and, weakened by its loss, consciousness left him.

Shortly after the meeting between Cromillian and Pascal, during which the latter was killed, the Countess and Bertha, with their guests, Admiral Enright and his daughter Helen, were seated together in the library of the Castle Mont d'Oro. Suddenly, the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, who said:

"Adolphe, Monsieur Pascal Batistelli's valet, wishes to speak with you, madame."

The Countess arose. "I will go and see him. No; let him come in. We are all friends, and equally interested to hear what he may have to say."

Adolphe entered shortly and told his story, somewhat disjointedly, but from it his hearers learned that a fight had taken place between Cromillian and Pascal, in which the latter had been killed; that Manassa had told him that Vandemar and Vivienne were in the dungeon chamber and that there they must die, for the paper telling how to open the door had been lost; that Manassa had gone, no one knew whither, and that his master lay unburied. "There is no head to the house, and I know not what to do," he exclaimed. "I have come to you, Madame la Comtesse, for advice."

The Countess turned to Bertha. "What can we say?" she asked, her voice trembling with excitement.

"We must leave it all to the Admiral," replied Bertha.

Turning to the Admiral, the Countess said: "I am sorry, my dear Admiral, to thus burden you, but there is no one but you to whom we may turn in this dreadful dilemma."

Thus summoned to take the leading part in the affair, the Admiral at once displayed that great faculty in grasping details and organising action, which had made him famous.

"Go home, young man," he said to Adolphe, "and tell the nurse, Clarine I believe you called her, to prepare your master's body for burial. I will come to the castle soon and tell you what to do next."

After Adolphe had gone, the Admiral turned to the Countess and said: "It is our duty to go at once to the castle. That poor girl hasn't a relative in the world. Nor the boy either. Not a soul to take charge of an effort for their liberation but ourselves. It is horrible. They shall be freed, and it devolves upon us to do it."

"I agree with you, Admiral," said the Countess, "but I do not think it safe for us to do so unless we are accompanied by a proper guard."

"Have no fear," said the Admiral; "fortunately, that is provided for. I am momentarily expecting the arrival of a detachment of sailors and marines from the ship, for whom I have sent to protect myself and daughter until we are safe again on board our vessel. When they arrive, we will see what strong hands and willing hearts can do in so worthy a cause. Let us make preparations to go at once."

The Countess left the room to give an order to her male retainers to accompany them.

Both the Countess and Bertha were greatly interested in the terrible condition and probable fate of Vandemar and Vivienne. The Countess had known Manuel Della

Coscia and remembered the pretty little boy who had now grown to man's estate. Then, too, she had thought a great deal of Vivienne, but had not allowed her interest to go beyond a certain point. She knew that the girl was lovable, but she felt that if she betrayed her own affection, it might lead her to encourage the Count in his attentions to Mlle. Batistelli. In her heart she knew that her son would never make Vivienne a good husband, and she was too honest and sincere a woman to wish to secure her own happiness by making another unhappy.

Bertha's feelings were prompted by the natural sympathy of youth for youth. This sympathy was intensified by the fact that her own love affair was in a similar condition. To be sure, she did not feel that her life was in danger, but she did not know but that Jack was already dead. Were not Vandemar and Vivienne happier than she? They were together and, if they could not be saved, they could die in each other's arms. If Jack were dead and she thus left alone, what possible hope of future happiness could there be for her?

"My dear," said the Countess, as she re-entered the room, "there is a messenger downstairs who wishes to see you on very important business."

"A messenger?" exclaimed Bertha, and her cheek paled. "Why, who can it be? I know no one in Corsica——"

"He would tell me nothing except that he came from your guardian."

"My guardian!" cried Bertha, and her pale face grew still whiter. "I will not see him."

"I think it best that you should," said the Countess, decidedly.

Bertha thought for a moment: "I will go down, if you will come with me."

"I think it best that you should go alone," the Countess rejoined.

When Bertha reached the room, a man who had been seated at the farther end arose and came towards her. He was heavily bearded and Bertha considered him to be a stranger to her. She lowered her eyes.

"You have come from my guardian?" she asked, in a voice hardly audible.

"Yes—he is dead."

"Dead?" cried Bertha. She knew her thoughts were wicked, but the words gave her a sense of relief.

"How—" she had wished to ask—"How did it happen?" but she could utter only the monosyllable.

"He was killed by one of Cromillian's band, who mistook him for a spy."

Something in the man's voice caused her to gaze at him intently, searchingly.

"Jack!"—and with a glad cry Bertha sprang forward and threw her arms about the young man's neck.

"Forgive me—that beard—I did not know you—and your voice—I am so glad that you are safe"—and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

"I am sorry for him. He may be better off," said Jack. "Here are some valuable papers that he had on him wholly relating to yourself, and which you should guard carefully."

"I hope this is the end, Jack," she breathed, softly.

"I hope so—of our troubles," he answered, "but others are in trouble. I must get help for a man whom I found in the road, shot through the lungs. I was not strong enough to carry him. Where is Count Mont d'Oro?"

"He, too, is dead," said Bertha. "Perhaps Admiral Enright can help you—but what is that?" she cried.

They listened.

"It sounds like the beating of a drum," said Jack, and he ran to the window. "Come here, Bertha. There is a body of sailors—English sailors, I think—and marines in front of the house."

"Yes, I know," said Bertha. "Admiral Enright sent to his ship for them, and now let us seek him out and also the Countess Mont d'Oro, who will be glad you are come, for everything here in Corsica seems to be at sixes and sevens."

The Admiral greeted Jack with the utmost cordiality. "I knew that your good friend, and my Lieutenant, Victor Duquesne, was very much worried because of your absence, and I am glad you have returned to give a good account of yourself."

Jack gave a brief recital of his wanderings since he left the hotel at Ajaccio, and also explained the condition of the wounded man, upon hearing which the Admiral immediately detailed four sailors to accompany Jack on his humane errand.

"My dear Countess," said the Admiral, "our young friend has gone to save one life; it is now our duty to see if we can save two."

It was a strange procession that left the house of the Countess Mont d'Oro and, escorted by the sailors and marines, soon reached the Batistelli castle. The Admiral and his daughter were in advance, while close behind them were the Countess Mont d'Oro, and Bertha who insisted upon accompanying them, declaring that nothing would induce her to remain at home alone.

Adolphe and Clarine stood in the open doorway waiting to receive them, and led the party through rooms and corridors, and up the steep stone stairway to the Hall of Mirrors. The picture they formed, transferred to canvas, would have won fame and fortune for the artist. There was the Admiral in the handsome uniform of his rank; the Countess dressed in the latest Parisian style, and Helen and Bertha in plain and simple attire, forming a marked contrast with the uniforms of the jack-tars and marines. The company was not very large, but its numbers were, apparently,

multiplied by the mirrors on the walls, and it seemed as though a vast concourse was present.

The Admiral studied carefully the picture disclosed by the parting of the hinged mirrors. All could see that the artist had depicted a well-known incident in the garden of Eden.

"Does any one here know aught about the dungeon?" inquired the Admiral.

Adolphe led the old nurse, Clarine, forward. "I am the only one who knows," she said. Clarine then told what she knew of the history of the dungeon chamber, the paper left by Vivienne's father, how she had given it to the young girl on her birthday, and how it had disappeared, no one knew how or where.

"I understand," said Admiral Enright. "There is no key to the door, nor handle, so it must be opened from the outside, by some ingenious concealed mechanism. To state the problem is easy, but I fear it will be hard to solve it. My dear," turning to his daughter Helen, "you are well versed in regard to the castles of olden times and their dungeons. Have you learned, in all your studies of them, anything which may aid us in the present case?"

Helen had been standing apart from the rest, eagerly scanning the picture before her. At her father's words she came forward and lightly touched the picture at different points with her finger.

"May one of your men assist me?" she asked, turning to the Admiral.

The Admiral motioned for one of the sailors to come forward.

"There must be some connection, father," she said, "between the picture and what we may call the lock, which, in cases I have read of, is formed of bolts held in place by certain springs acted upon in a way which we must ascertain. You see, here are Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, standing beneath a tree, and

above them the wicked serpent with glistening eyes. There is the apple in Eve's hand. Now, if we follow the story as it is written, the serpent tempted Eve and Eve tempted Adam, who ate the apple. Now, supposing your man will place the forefinger of his right hand on the eye of the serpent and keep it there. Now, place the forefinger of your left hand on the stem of the apple. Now, press hard." Suddenly there was a sound—a grating sound—like the moving of one metallic surface upon another; yet there was no movement of the door.

"Not quite," exclaimed Helen, excitedly, "but thank God we must be nearing the solution. Now place a finger upon Eve's mouth; now on Adam's ear. Now, press hard."

Again the grating sound, but still the doors did not open.

Helen now gazed long at the picture, while all present watched her in tense silence.

"Two of the bolts have been shot, father," she said at last, "but there must be a third, and possibly more. Ah!" she exclaimed, as a sudden thought seemed to strike her, no doubt impelled by the idea of pushing Adam out of the garden of Eden, "press with all your might upon Adam's chest!"

The sailor sprang forward to obey her command. Again the grating sound; this time much louder. There was a creaking noise, and the door opened slowly, as though pushed from within by invisible hands.

A wild shout of delight arose from the company, for there, standing side by side, were Vandemar and Vivienne. They had heard the grating and creaking and knew that the hour of their deliverance had come. All stood awe-hushed as Vandemar, seemingly the shadow of his former self, and Vivienne, with tear-stained face and pallid cheek, came forth.

"Bless—my—soul! Re-mark-a-ble!" exclaimed the

Admiral, and he ran forward and grasped the young man's hand.

The strong-armed sailor started to lend his support to Victor, but he was abruptly put aside by a young man, who now rushed through the crowd and helped lead Victor forward. It was Jack, who had performed his errand of humanity, and had arrived just in time to witness the release of his friend.

Pylades and Orestes were again reunited.

Simultaneously Vivienne was clasped in the arms of Clarine, who had been as a mother to her and had loved her all her life. With the assistance of the Countess and Bertha, Vivienne was led to a chair. Her first words were:

"Where is my brother Pascal?"

"He is dead," cried Clarine. "Cromillian killed him. You are the last of the Batistellis."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FATHER AND SON.

WHILE the company had been at the Batistelli castle, Jack had performed the task intrusted to him. Cromillian had been brought in, a doctor called, and the flow of blood stanchd. He was in a high state of fever and was delirious. He kept calling for his men to follow him and save Vandemar and Vivienne by tearing down the castle walls. "It is the only way," he cried time after time, and after each exertion would fall into a stupor.

The next morning, when the doctor came, he was rational. He had been told that Vandemar and Vivienne had been liberated, and the intelligence had produced a most quieting effect.

"What is my real condition, Doctor?" he asked. "Tell me the truth. I can bear it. I have a duty to perform and wish to know whether there is time."

"Well, sir," said the doctor, "your wound is a mortal one. You are a very strong man and have great vitality. You will live another day, perhaps two, but I can offer you no hope beyond that."

"Thank you," said Cromillian. "I knew as much. I wish to see Vandemar. Let him come to me at once and have him bring two witnesses. I have something to tell him about his father."

It was not long before Vandemar appeared, accompanied by the Admiral and Countess Mont d'Oro. Vandemar's first words were:

"They said you could tell me something of my father. Where can I find him?"

"You will not have to go far. I am he—I am called Cromillian, but my right name is Manuel Della Coscia."

His hearers were astonished, Vandemar most of all. Could this bandit be the father whom he had so longed to see?

"I do not expect you to love me, my son. It is unnatural that you should, for we have never been close to each other. But, before I die, I must remove a stigma from our family name. You are the last of the line, Vandemar, and should know the truth. Let your friends draw near, for my story is a long one and I am weaker than I thought."

"Vandemar and friends, as sure as there is a God in Heaven, I did not kill Conrad Batistelli. The old Count Mont d'Oro and Conrad Batistelli had a dispute about some land, for you know their estates adjoin. Pardon me, lady, for what I am forced to say, but it is the truth."

"One day, I met the old Count, who asked me if I had my stiletto with me. He had left home without his, and as he was going to examine his estate and might meet Batistelli, he was afraid that an altercation might ensue, when he, being unarmed, would be at a disadvantage. That evening I went to the Count's house to get back my stiletto, for it was a valuable one and bore my initials. To my horror, I learned that he had killed Conrad Batistelli with it and, unthinkingly, had left the weapon beside the dead body of his victim."

"I was a widower; you were a little boy of six. The Batistellis were powerful, and I knew that our lives would be forfeited if we remained in Corsica. The Count gave me all the money he had in his possession, and a letter of credit for a large sum. I took you, mounted a fleet horse supplied by the Count, and made my way to Ajaccio. I obtained a disguise and, a few days later, secured a passage to France. I made my

way at once to England, where I placed you at school. The Count sent me more money, from time to time, and I lived the life of a man of leisure; but when you were old enough to enter the Navy, my occupation was gone. I had taken the name of Hector Duquesne, and had given you that of Victor.

"I wearied of my quiet, do-nothing life, and decided to come back to Corsica. But what could I do here? If I returned under my own name, although I was an innocent man, the vendetta would claim me as a victim. I assumed the name of Cromillian and organised my company of moral bandits, pledged to do all they could to discountenance the practice of the vendetta.

"But I yearned to see you, and wrote to you, telling you who you were and why you had been banished from your native land, though I did not tell you when and where you could see me. I had hoped to meet you in some way, look upon your face for the last time, and then warn you to leave Corsica forever. You must do it now. My life will soon pay the forfeit, and yours will if you remain here. The vendetta never dies while food for the stiletto or the rifle remains alive."

The Countess was deeply affected by Cromillian's story. She had never dreamed that her husband was connected in any way with such a tragedy. What a whirligig of fate it was which had brought the father and son together under her roof. Cromillian must have divined what was passing in the Countess's mind.

"My dear lady," he said, "do not worry about what I have told you. The Corsicans are born murderers. If your husband had not killed Conrad Batistelli, he would have lost his own life. Is Pascal dead?"

"Yes," said Vandemar, "he is to be buried to-morrow."

"I shall soon follow him. Have they found old Manassa? I fired at him after he shot me, and then he ran for the woods."

"We shall have a search made for him," said Vandemar.

Father and son were left together. Each was at the portal of a new life. One was to go—he knew not where; the other looked forward to a life of happiness with the woman he loved.

As the Admiral and the Countess left the room, the former asked:

"Have you ever found anything among your husband's papers bearing on this affair of the vendetta? I believe this man's story, but even the truth should be verified."

"No," the Countess replied; "since my husband died in Paris, I have visited Corsica only when it was absolutely necessary to learn from my steward the condition of my affairs. The Count's private papers are here, but they have never been disturbed since his death."

"Suppose we look at them now," suggested the Admiral.

A careful search disclosed a sealed packet, endorsed "Manuel Della Coscia. Statement of Account." Below was written in a trembling hand, "Closed." It was opened by the Admiral, and found to contain, among other papers, a signed statement corroborating in every particular the story told by Cromillian. The writer expressed his regret that he could not make a more adequate return for the great service rendered him by Manuel Della Coscia.

Vandemar's father was sinking rapidly. The Countess and her guests were gathered at his bedside, and she had informed him of the finding of the paper, among her late husband's effects, which entirely exonerated the Della Coscias from all complicity in the murder. A look of pleasure overspread the face of the wounded man as he motioned for Vandemar and Vivienne to approach. He joined their hands.

"Thus ends a Corsican vendetta," he said, solemnly; then, seeing Jack and Bertha, he smiled faintly and added: "And an English family feud."

His passing was painless and peaceful. At his request, his gravestone bore but one word—CHROMILLIAN.

The searching party that had been sent out to look for Old Manassa returned and reported that they had scoured the *maquis*, but could see no trace of him. His body was never found.

Admiral Enright at last received the orders from London for which he had been waiting so long. He told his hostess that he must join his ship and proceed at once to Portsmouth.

"Young man," he said, turning to Vandemar, "you ought to go with me. On Mademoiselle Batistelli's account, however, I will allow you to reach Portsmouth by way of Paris."

"You will find me there waiting for you," said Vandemar Della Coscia.

"And what am I to do?" asked Jack, turning to Bertha.

"You have neglected your duties as heir of the Earl of Noxton," broke in the Admiral, with mock severity, "and you have added to your responsibilities by that neglect."

Jack looked disturbed.

"I know, my dear Admiral, I have been very remiss, but you must own there have been extenuating circumstances."

"Oh, yes," said Admiral Enright, "I see her,"—and he looked at Bertha, who blushed prettily.

"No doubt we all wish to leave these scenes," said the Countess. "I shall return eventually, but for the present I shall open my Paris residence, where, with Bertha, we shall be pleased to welcome you as our guests so long as you can find it convenient to stay."

On the afternoon preceding the day of departure,

a solemn conclave was held in the library of the Mont d'Oro castle.

"Mademoiselle Batistelli," said the Admiral, turning to Vivienne, "is it your intention to return to the Batistelli castle eventually, or——"

"Never!" broke in Vivienne. "I shall never step within its doors again. I couldn't. Nothing but distressing memories are connected with its walls, and I never wish to set foot in Corsica again."

"I had thought as much," remarked the Countess, "and had so expressed myself to Admiral Enright. As it adjoins my estate, I will make you a proposition. With your consent—and also that of your future husband—I will purchase the Batistelli castle and grounds at their proper valuation. Should this offer prove acceptable, it is my intention to raze the castle to the ground, and remove the hedge which has divided the estates for so many years. Thus all unpleasant memories will be banished. I shall be glad, for Paris is too noisy, and I shall have this castle to be the shelter of my declining years."

This plan proved agreeable, and it was arranged that some of the Batistelli servants, including Clarine, should be added to the Mont d'Oro household; the others were dismissed with gratuities.

The next day the *Osprey* set sail from Ajaccio, bearing the Admiral and his daughter. It was arranged that Vandemar and Vivienne, and Jack and Bertha, accompanied by the Countess Mont d'Oro, should go at once to Paris.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"MERRIE ENGLAND."

VIVIENNE had wished Clarine to accompany her to England, for Vandemar had expressed his intention of making that country his future home.

"No, my darling," said the old nurse, "I would like to go with you, but those whom I have served, and all, whom I have loved, excepting yourself, are dead and buried here in Corsica. Until within a short time, you have loved me better than any one else in the world, but now your love—all your love—belongs to another, and old Clarine will not ask you to divide it. I have not long to stay—you will not blame me, I know—but when I die, I wish to be buried in my native land. I could not die happy if I were to be laid away in that far off country, so far from those I——" Here the old nurse's feelings overcame her, and her voice was so choked with sobs that she could not speak. Vivienne comforted her as best she could, and told her that she would write to her regularly, and that some day she might come with her husband to pay her a visit.

"Countess Mont d'Oro has agreed to take you into her household, Clarine. If she had not done so, I should have insisted upon your going with me, but with her I know that you will be well treated, and if you are sick you will have the best of care. She has promised me as much."

Vandemar had a conversation with Admiral Enright before the sailing of the *Osprey*.

"My duty is to join my ship at once," the young man had said.

"Young people do not see their duty sometimes as clearly as do their elders," the Admiral had replied. "The time you spent in that dungeon has broken you down physically—I will not say mentally—as much as a three years' cruise would have done. I am commander of the ship and I know that my action will be sustained by the Admiralty. I grant you a furlough of thirty days. If you cannot make Mademoiselle Batis-telli your wife and join me at Portsmouth by the end of that time, you deserve to be court-martialled, and I will see that you are."

Never had the mansion of the Countess Mont d'Oro been so ablaze with light as on the evening when she, accompanied by her guests, arrived in Paris. She had previously sent word as to what preparations she wished made for their coming. She had no sooner stepped over the threshold than she turned, and, with a blending of French fervour and Italian grace, with both hands extended, welcomed her guests.

"This is my city home," she cried. "It shall be yours as long as you wish to stay. I have been mistress here for so long that it will be a pleasure for me to take orders from others. Command me, and I will obey."

Vivienne had never been outside of Corsica and she viewed with wonder the beauties of the great city. It was the time of the Second Empire, and the Prince-President, on assuming the crown, had determined to make the people of Paris happy. He knew that Paris was France, and that if Parisians were happy the rest of the country would be tranquil.

During Bertha's previous stay in the city, she had seen but few of its attractions, for she had declined to accompany Count Mont d'Oro, and had gone out very seldom with the Countess.

Vandemar and Vivienne, and Jack and Bertha, made

a happy party and there were no restrictions upon their enjoyment. When asked to accompany them the Countess had replied:

"I have had my day as an active participant; I take the most pleasure now in seeing others enjoy themselves."

Twenty days of Lieutenant Victor Duquesne's furlough had expired. In his intercourse with the outside world, he still retained the name by which he was known in the Navy.

"When my name is changed upon the Navy roster," he told the Countess, "I shall feel as though I had some legal right to it."

"You will have to claim a legal right to it before then," said the Countess. "You have no father nor mother, and I feel it is my duty to act towards you in place of both. Your friend, Mr. De Vinne, has a father and a mother living, and can take Miss Renville to his own home. You, at present, have no home, and as your combined father and mother, and as the combined father and mother of Mademoiselle Batistelli, you must take your choice between becoming the husband of Vivienne within the next ten days, or you will be obliged to leave her here in Paris. You careless, thoughtless, headstrong young men are very apt to forget the proprieties. You think that Vivienne belongs to you, and that nobody else has any interest in her, but, young man, bear in mind that until you legally and lawfully make her your wife, she is mine. You remember I lived next door to her in Corsica."

Vandemar took Jack into his confidence.

"What am I to do, old man? Here's the Countess says that I must marry Vivienne or she can't let her go to England with me. She says you have a home to take your lady-love to, while I have none. I intend to make one, though."

"The Countess is right," said Jack, "and do you

know I have been thinking that the best way to overcome possible objection is to render it futile."

"Well, I can't say that I follow you," remarked Vandemar.

"Well, you will understand me," said Jack, "when I express my determination of following you."

Still Vandemar did not understand. "Why, of course," said he, "we always intended to go to England together."

"Yes," said Jack. "Our original intention was to go as four separate individuals, but as the Fates seem to have decided that you and Vivienne must go as a couple, I am more than willing to take time by the forelock and, with Bertha's kind co-operation, make another couple."

Vandemar grasped Jack's hand. "From the time we first met until to-day, Jack, I've never got into any kind of trouble, any sort of a dilemma, that you did not contrive some way of getting me out of it."

"Well, you know," said Jack, "that somehow or other we neither of us have forgotten the old story of Pylades and Orestes."

"And I hope we never shall," said Vandemar, fervently.

A sudden thought came to Jack. "Well, I may have kept faith with you and done part, if not all that I should have done in your behalf, but there is one poor fellow whom I have entirely forgotten, so fully have I been carried away by my own happiness."

"Clarence?" queried Vandemar.

"Yes," said Jack. "No news comes from that out-of-the-way place from which we have providentially escaped with our lives, and what is worth more, our wives to-be. Poor Clarence does not yet know of the death of his father. I will go and talk the whole matter over with Bertha, and we will decide what is best to write him."

Clarence Glynne's recovery had been rapid after the arrival of his wife. He had not been affected so much by the exhibit of his father's enmity towards him as he was by the supposed loss of his wife, whom he dearly loved. The departure of his father in quest of Bertha made him virtual master of Buckholme, and he lost no time in installing his wife as its mistress. He had explained matters to Mr. Lake, giving him a most liberal *douceur*, and had received the detective's promise that no publicity would be given to the affair of Glynne *vs.* Glynne.

Clarence resumed his position as head of the mercantile house of Walmonth & Company, and everything moved along much more smoothly and happily than it had before.

"The day of reckoning will come some time," he said to his wife, one morning at breakfast.

"Well, Clarence," she replied, "there is an old adage about not borrowing trouble. When the day of reckoning comes, we will figure up both sides of the account and see to whom the balance is due. I know you will pardon me when I say that I think your father has been playing a deep game. So far as you are concerned, there is no reason why the truth should not be known, but I don't think he will be willing to have it divulged. In such a case the balance will be on your side. You suspect what the truth is, and if you should mention your suspicions to the authorities, the truth would have to come out."

"That may be so," said Clarence, "but a man doesn't like to get his father in a hole, and then shake a stick at him and tell him he can't come out unless he pays up."

"I don't say, Clarence, but that you are indebted to your father for your existence, but I really think you owe him very little love, and I am sure I have never had any for him, nor he for me."

Jennie might have said more, but conversation was cut short by the entrance of Brinkley with the morning mail.

Clarence was so busily engaged with his breakfast that Jennie took the letters. She glanced over them quickly, throwing them, one by one, upon the table. The postmark of the last one she regarded attentively.

"Why, here's one from Paris," she exclaimed.

"From father?" asked her husband, still intent upon his bacon and eggs.

"No," said she. "I will open it and read it to you."

Womanlike she looked at the end of the letter first.

"Why, Clarence," she exclaimed, "it's from Jack De Vinne."

"Go on," said her husband, as he buttered a muffin, "let's hear what he says," and Jennie read:

"MY DEAR CLARENCE:

"I have been very remiss in my duty to you. I should have written to you long before this and conveyed to you some intelligence which you will find of the greatest importance. Let me give you my excuse first. I cannot tell you the whole story now, for I am not an adept at letter-writing, and usually confine my communications to a statement of bald facts. Well, the facts are these. By a curious coincidence I met my dear friend Victor Duquesne in Corsica. Bertha had gone there with the Countess Mont d'Oro, and I, as you know, followed her. Admiral Enright's ship, upon which Victor was a lieutenant, came to Ajaccio shortly after I arrived, so we met. Your father followed Bertha to Corsica, intending to prevent my meeting with her. She was not poor, as your father had told me, but possesses a fortune in her own right. Your father was to be her guardian until the day of her marriage, when, by her father's will, she was to be put

in possession of her fortune. You see now why your father wished you to marry her and why he did not want her to marry anybody else."

"We knew all that before, didn't we, Clarence?" exclaimed Jennie.

"Yes," said her husband, as he buttered a third muffin. "Go on, he's got something more to tell. I know Jack; he writes just as he talks."

"I cannot tell you all now, Clarence, all the terrible things that occurred in Corsica while we were there. The vendetta is the national pastime. We all got mixed up in it, and fortunate are we that we escaped with our lives; many did not. But Bertha and I, and Victor and his lady-love, a beautiful young Corsican girl named Vivienne Batistelli, and our mutual friend, Countess Mont d'Oro, are all safe now in Paris. I have written all this, Clarence, in the vain hope that I should find some way of breaking sad news to you in such a manner as not to give you too sudden a shock."

Clarence dropped his knife and fork and looked intently at his wife. "I told you so, Jennie. I knew he was holding something back. But read on; it cannot be any worse than I think it is. I imagined while you were reading that something had happened, for how could Jack know about Bertha's fortune?"

"You are right," said his wife, who had been reading ahead while he had been talking; "you are right, Clarence, your father is gone. Jack says he was made captive by one party of bandits while your father was a captive with another band. Your father escaped with the evident intention of following Jack, but when challenged by the guard he did not answer quickly enough and was shot down. Jack saw that he was buried, and took possession of the papers upon him. He says that

one of those papers was the will of Oscar Renville, and he took the liberty of giving it to Bertha, who read it. Those are not his own words," said Jennie. "I will read it just as it is here, if you wish, Clarence."

"Is there any more?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, another page."

"Bertha wishes me to say to you that if your father, in the performance of his duty as guardian, has invested a part of her fortune in the business of Walmonth & Company, she has no desire to withdraw it at present. She is willing to make an arrangement by which a suitable interest may be paid her upon the amount. If it has all been invested in the business, a share in the profits, she thinks, would be more equitable. But all can be arranged when we arrive in England. Trusting that you and your wife are enjoying good health, and with kind regards from Bertha and myself, I am,

"Sincerely yours,

"JOHN DE VINNE."

"I cannot give you a royal wedding," said the Countess Mont d'Oro, "but I am willing and able to make it a princely one."

Both the young ladies protested against such extravagance.

"I have no one else to squander my money upon," said the Countess. "Just think of it, you, Bertha, are going to be a countess, and probably Vivienne will one day hear her future husband addressed as Admiral."

"Yes," cried Bertha, "but both of those events are likely to be far in the future. I do not wish my presumptive father-in-law to die, and I know that it is long, in times of peace, before a lieutenant becomes an Admiral."

"But these are not times of peace," cried the Count-

ess. "There is going to be a war. A friend of mine who is intimate at Court says that it will not be many months before France will declare war against Russia. It is something about the Crimea, but what that is I really do not know."

"Why, that's part of Russia," cried Bertha. "Or perhaps the Russians wish to add it to their Empire. I remember reading about Peter the Great and how he founded the city of St. Petersburg. The book said that one hundred thousand men lost their lives from fever and other forms of disease while the city was being built."

"Yes," said the Countess, sharply, "these rulers are always willing to sacrifice the lives of their subjects if they can add thereby to their own power. I am a lover of peace."

"So am I," said Vivienne, "but are there not times when an honourable war is better than a dishonourable peace?"

The Countess did not answer the question, but said, gaily: "We are not here to discuss war, but an honourable peace. You two young ladies have capitulated, and the victors demand their booty—I should have said beauty."

"Let it be a quiet wedding," said Bertha, "with as few people present as possible."

"That's my idea, exactly," said Vivienne.

"Well, you may have your own way so far as the marriage itself is concerned," said the Countess. "About one part of the festivities though, I shall insist upon having my own way. After the marriage we will have a reception, and I shall claim the right to invite to that whom I please, and as many as I please."

The wedding reception was over and the last guest had departed.

"This is the happiest day I have ever passed in this

house," said the Countess. "I am glad that my last days in it have been connected with such a series of happy events."

"Why," cried Vivienne, "are you not going to live in Paris?"

"No," said the Countess, "I have already made arrangements to sell the house. I am going back to Corsica to live. I may never see you again, but you must write and tell me how happy you are, and your letters will be a great solace to me."

"But you must come and see us," said Bertha, "after we settle down in England."

"No," said the Countess, decidedly, "after I go back to Corsica I shall never leave it again. But we must not talk any more about my travels, which are of little consequence. The carriage will be here in half an hour to take you to the station. Lieutenant Della Coscia's furlough expires day after to-morrow, and he must be in Portsmouth to meet the Admiral. Is it not so, Monsieur Lieutenant?"

"You have spoken the truth, Countess," said Vandemar. "We have had our days of pleasure, and now for me come days of duty."

The Countess did not break down when the moment for parting came. "You have my blessing," she said, almost gaily; "life is bright for you, and I feel glad that I have in some small degree contributed to your happiness. Don't forget to write to me," were her last words as they descended the steps to enter the waiting carriage.

When Lieutenant and Madame Della Coscia and Mr. and Mrs. John De Vinne—or as we should have said Lord and Lady De Vinne—arrived at Portsmouth they learned that Admiral Enright was away on leave. About a fortnight previous to their arrival, the Admiral, accompanied by his daughter, had gone to his estate in Devonshire.

An officer of the *Osprey*, who was staying at the same hotel with the married couples, informed Vandemar and Jack that the Admiral's leave would expire in three days, and that he would surely return by that time.

The young gentlemen and their wives were on their honeymoons, and the delay made little difference to them.

A week elapsed before Vandemar, who was in the smoking room, espied the Admiral's genial face as he alighted from a carriage. In a moment Vandemar was with him and, arm in arm, they went back to the smoking room, where cigars were lighted.

"What is the matter?" asked Vandemar. "I hope your daughter is not sick. She is not with you. What caused your delay?"

The Admiral laughed immoderately; finally he ejaculated: "Bless my soul! A most re-mark-a-ble affair."

"Tell me all about it," cried Vandemar. "Madame Della Coscia is out driving with Mr. and Mrs. De Vinne and I am lonesome."

"I hardly know where to begin," said the Admiral, and again he laughed heartily.

"Why not at the beginning?" queried Vandemar.

"That's not a bad idea," said the Admiral. "Well, you know Doctor John Frobisher, who was surgeon on the *Osprey*?"

"Remember Jack Frobisher?" broke in Vandemar. "Of course I do! A mighty good fellow. Hard to get acquainted with, though. Bashful or diffident, I don't know which."

"You haven't got the right word," said the Admiral. "He was jealous."

"Jealous!" cried Vandemar. "Of whom?"

"I think," said the Admiral, "that it must have been a certain lieutenant attached to the *Osprey*, who was, I judge from what you have told me, lately married in Paris to a beautiful young Corsican lady."

"Whew!" exclaimed Vandemar. "What possible proof can you have for such a ridiculous statement?"

"Well," remarked the Admiral, "if you will let me go on with my story, I think I can make it as plain to you as it is to me."

"Proceed, my dear Admiral," said Vandemar, "but when you are through you will have to undergo a cross-examination."

"My estate," the Admiral began, "is a good five miles from the nearest village. When we left the mail-coach my own carriage was waiting for us—I ordered it ahead—but it was nine o'clock at night, and dark at that. I was for staying over night, but as we had a guest with us, Helen was for pushing on—and on we pushed."

Vandemar forgot himself: "A guest?—Excuse me, Admiral."

"Oh, that's all right. I ought to have told you that Doctor Frobisher was with us. He's an orphan or something of that sort and had no place to go. Well, we had covered about two miles when we heard a pistol-shot close behind us, and Chudleigh, our driver, pulled up the horses with a jerk. Jack jumped out to see what the matter was. His feet had no sooner touched the ground than he saw a pistol pointed at him. Bless my soul! We were at the mercy of a highwayman, the worst of all land sharks. The fellow made me get out next, but Helen refused to move. She argued with the highwayman, telling him that his calling was nefarious and that he would surely end his days on the scaffold. The fellow reached in, caught hold of Helen, and tried to pull her out of the carriage. That was more than Jack could stand. He jumped upon the rascal and down they went. That fencing of yours was fine—the best I ever saw—but in a rough-and-tumble fight I think Jack can hold his own with the best of them. When

Jack got through with the highwayman, we left him to sleep off his troubles."

"Good for Jack!" Vandemar exclaimed, involuntarily.

"You are right," said the Admiral. "You know how fond Helen is of personal bravery? Well, she was delighted, and she told John so. Either the scuffle or her praise unlimbered his tongue, and while I was asleep in a corner of the carriage, he had the audacity to propose and was accepted. A most re-mark-a-ble affair. They were married a week ago. I couldn't get away any sooner."

At that moment the driving party returned, and all joined in congratulating the Admiral in saving his money from the highwayman and securing so desirable a son-in-law.

"Now, Admiral," said Vandemar, "you can help us. The two husbands and wives now before you have no place to call their own in which they can lay their heads. We are willing to buy or lease. Where can we go?"

"I know just the place," cried the Admiral. "It was made for you. It is called Crow Lodge, and is about a quarter of a mile from my own place."

"I should change the name at once," said Vivienne.

"And what would you call it?" asked Vandemar.

"I should name it after our best friend," she replied, "Countess Mont d'Oro—Marie Lodge. Would not that be a pretty name? It is to her more than to any one else that we owe our present happiness, and I am going to name everything I can after her."

The Admiral looked up, and with a roguish twinkle in his eye, asked: "Even——"

Vivienne blushed rosy red; the others laughed, but she answered stoutly: "Yes, even!"

Jack and Bertha had been guests at Marie Lodge but

a few days when an urgent summons came from his mother, the Countess. Before leaving Portsmouth, Jack had wired his father of his intended visit to Devonshire, and had given his address. The summons was in the form of a telegram. It read: "Come home at once. Your father is at the point of death."

"You must come with me, Bertha," said Jack. "Your place is by my side. I know my mother will receive you as a daughter. If my father has any objections to our marriage, it is too late to prevent it, but I wish his forgiveness, if he thinks such an act necessary, before he dies."

The Earl of Noxton's illness had not been of long duration, but he had suffered intense pain. Nature, at last, had succumbed in so far as to offer no further resistance to the inroads of disease; instead, there had come that physical peace and that lucid interval which so often precede dissolution.

As Jack had presaged, the Countess welcomed Bertha warmly.

"She is beautiful, is she not, mother?" asked Jack when they were alone.

"Yes," said the Countess, "and she is poor. When I was married to your father he said I was beautiful, and I was poor."

"You are beautiful now, mother," said Jack, as he embraced her. "But Bertha is not poor. I thought she was, for her guardian told me so, but it turns out that she is rich."

The three sat by the bedside of the dying man. The Earl of Noxton fixed his eyes intently upon Bertha.

"Who is she, John?" he asked, in a faint voice.

"She is my wife, father."

"Ah, I remember, you told me about her. You said she was beautiful. I can see that for myself, but you also told me that she was poor. Well, your mother was both beautiful and poor when I married her, and I have

never regretted that I made her a Countess. I hope you will not."

Jack's mother led Bertha away. "You must not mind his last words," she said. "We knew that John had gone in search of you and we imagined what the end would be. The Earl's father was opposed to our marriage, but Carolus was determined that I should be his wife, and I knew that John was like his father. My only wish is that the Earl could have lived to have seen you both happy."

Jack stood by the bedside and took his father's wasted hand in his. "Have I your forgiveness, father?"

The thin fingers closed upon his own; then he heard the words: "It runs in the blood; like father, like son."

Both Vandemar and Clarence were soon in receipt of letters informing them of the death and burial of the Earl of Noxton. They read, too, in the papers, of the demise of Lord Carolus De Vinne, Earl of Noxton, and the announcement of the accession of his son John De Vinne to the title. The item contained the information that the young Earl had been married while in Paris to Miss Bertha Renville, daughter of the late Oscar Renville, who had left her a large fortune which would go to swell the revenues of the young Earl. The item further stated that the young Countess of Noxton was a beautiful English girl, and when the period of retirement was over she would, no doubt, prove a great acquisition to London society.

As Countess Mont d'Oro foretold, the war cloud grew black, and England, France, and Sardinia made a triple alliance against the aggressions of Russia in the Crimea.

"Admiral," said Vandemar, "I am going to London to ask the Admiralty for active service."

"Nonsense," cried the Admiral. "You stay at home and look after your wife. This is not to be a naval war; this affair is to be fought out on land, and a sailor on land is of no more use than a turtle on its back. Be-

sides," the Admiral added, "I have arranged matters with the Admiralty. I am ordered to duty at Portsmouth, and I have requested that you should be with me."

Vandemar saw that it was in vain to protest.

"We shall be very comfortably situated," said the Admiral. "My son-in-law has resigned his position in the Navy and will at once take up general practice. Our doctor here is too old to go out nights, and John is to step into his shoes. Of course, after getting the best of the highwayman, John will not be afraid to go out late at night, and then, you see, Vandemar, we can run back and forth, and if we have to remain away from home any length of time, Vivienne can stay with Helen. If you are not satisfied with that arrangement, I must say I am."

As the Admiral had said, the issues of the Crimean war were settled by the Army and not by the Navy. The battle of the Alma; the famous charge of Lord Raglan at Balaklava; the battle of Inkermann, on the night before which ten thousand British soldiers joined in singing "Annie Laurie," and the siege and fall of Sebastopol followed each other, but not in as quick succession as have the battles in more modern warfare.

"Queen Victoria's very sick ;
Napoleon's got the measles ;
Sebastopol's not taken yet,
Pop go the weasels."

The words were those of a popular song; they were sung in a childish treble by a young blue-eyed and fair-haired boy who was playing on the terrace of Noxton Hall. The singer was Victor, the son and heir of John, Earl of Noxton.

"Why don't you sing, Marie?" asked the boy, addressing a little girl with dark hair and dark eyes, who sat beside him.

"I don't like to," said little Miss Della Coscia. "I don't think the words are pretty."

"Well, I do," rejoined Victor. "Papa says the English fought the Roosians and he says they beat them, too. Come, let's fight. You be Roosian and I'll be English." He started towards the little girl, who turned and fled, screaming at the top of her voice.

"Why, what's the matter, children?"

The speaker was Countess Mont d'Oro, who had been prevailed upon to visit England. She had resisted all entreaties until a picture had been sent her of her namesake, the little Marie. Then there had come to her heart a desire to see Vivienne's child, which she could not repress. The Earl had heard of her visit to Marie Lodge, and had insisted that Vandemar and his family, and the Countess, should pay them a visit at Noxton Hall.

Before the Countess could ascertain the reason for Marie's alarm, her loud cries had summoned Jack and Bertha, and Vandemar and Vivienne, to the terrace.

"What's the trouble, Victor?" asked his father.

"Nothing, only I wanted to play war, and Marie was Roosian and I was English, but when I showed fight she ran away and made lots of noise."

That evening after dinner Jack and Vandemar sat in the smoking room. As is often the custom with fond parents, who are good friends, they praised each other's children.

"I am proud of my namesake," said Vandemar; "he is a handsome, manly little fellow."

"And I think," said Jack, "that Marie, when she grows up, will be as beautiful as her mother. Who knows but that if my boy and your girl grow up together, she may, one day, be the Countess of Noxton?"

"Yes," said Vandemar, with feeling, "if their hearts so decide, and not our wills. Neither you nor I, Jack, will ever interfere with the love-making of our children."

Surely we have had enough of plots and counter-plots."

"Yes," said Jack, "if an obdurate guardian had prevailed, Bertha would not now be Countess of Noxton."

"Yes," spoke up Vandemar, "and if the Corsican vendetta had claimed its last victim, Vivienne would not now be the wife of Vandemar Della Coscia. By the way, Jack, what do you suppose the Countess told Vivienne to-day?"

"That she is going to sell her estates in Corsica and take up her residence in Paris once more."

"The first part of your guess is correct," said Vandemar, "but she is not going to live in Paris. She told Vivienne—I think I can repeat her very words, 'My past troubles are buried in Corsica, and my joys are yet to come with you and Merrie England.'"

THE END.

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